JOHN CREASEY

THE TOFF AND THE STOLEN TRESSES

PAPACHANJO

JOHN CREASEY

The Toff And The Stolen Tresses

Copyright Note
This e-book was created by ***papachanjo***, with the purpose of providing a digitized format of the books written by John Creasey without the least intention of commercial gain of any sort. This e-book should hence be utilized for reading only and if you like it and can buy it, please do to support the publishers.

This book was scanned by a friend in America along with others.

I am trying to create at least an ample collection of all the John Creasey books which are in the excess of 500 novels. Having read and possess just a meager 10 of his books does not qualify me to be a fan but the 10 I read were enough for me to rake up some effort to scan and create these e-books.

If you happen to have any John Creasey book and would like to add to the free online collection which I'm hoping to bring together, you can do the following:

Scan the book in greyscale

Save as djvu — use the free DJVU SOLO software to compress the images

Send it to my e-mail: papachanjo@rocketmail.com

I'll do the rest and will add a note of credit in the finished document.

from back cover

Three lovely heads have been shorn — long, silken hair has been cut off — and the Toff is faced with one of the most ingenious gangs of criminals that he has ever encountered. Clue after clue blazes a twisting and unexpected trail. And the Honourable Richard Rollison is drawn into an exciting climax deep in the heart of the East End, as he attempts to find a solution to the problem of the stolen tresses . . .

Table of Contents

Copyright Note
Chapter One
Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven
Chapter Eight
Chapter Nine
Chapter Ten
Chapter Eleven
Chapter Twelve
Chapter Thirteen
Chapter Fourteen
Chapter Fifteen
Chapter Sixteen
Chapter Seventeen
Chapter Eighteen
Chapter Nineteen
Chapter Twenty
Chapter Twenty-One
Chapter Twenty-Two
Chapter Twenty-Three

CHAPTER ONE
Goldilocks

"Sometimes I get so mad that I could have it cut off," said Evelyn Day, "or else have it dyed jet black. No one ever calls out "Blackbird" to Anne, and she has just as much hair as I have."

She was flushed. Her blue eyes sparkled because she was annoyed. She looked lovely. She made James Matthison Jones long to take her in his arms and hold and hug her, but he was a wise young man, and did not follow his inclination. He was tall as well as wise, and had a chunky kind of face and a look, even when he was serious, of drollery. Now he smiled at her.

"You'd rather cut off your hand than your hair," he said.

"Oh, don't talk such utter nonsense," retorted Evelyn Day. "Sometimes I wonder what you have for a mind. The next man who calls me Goldilocks, I'll—I'll—"

"Goldilocks," said Jimmy Jones, promptly. "It's the loveliest hair I've ever seen, and I don't care who calls you Goldilocks. I like to think that other people get a kick out of it, too."

"I'm not surprised that you're fond of hair," said Evelyn, tartly. "You'll be bald before you're thirty."

He was twenty-eight, and the prophecy was by no means baseless. He found his right hand smoothing over his bald patch. He did this for some time, while the laughter no longer lurked in but positively leapt out of his eyes.

"You've plenty for two," he declared. "How about fixing a date before anyone can accuse me of marrying you for your hair?"

Her look of annoyance faded and the anger went out of her eyes, while she touched the back of his right hand very lightly. They were sitting at a table in the Embankment Gardens during a lunch time in late May, and the wallflowers and tulips, the forget-me-nots and the polyanthus made a wonderful show, the lunch-hour band was playing not far away, and London's office workers were walking to and fro, only here and there was anyone in a hurry. All the seats along the paths were taken by people, young and old, eating sandwiches or fruit or chocolate. Behind them on the embankment proper the traffic was speeding, but there they seemed cut off from cars and river and the busy world.

"Jimmy," Evelyn said, "I don't want to hurt you, but I don't think I'll ever want to marry you. You know that really, don't you?"

"You've suggested it before," he conceded, and his smile didn't fade, tut until you're safely married off to your millionaire, I shall go on trying. The Joneses never give up."

"You know very well I'm not interested in how much money—" Evelyn began, but he squeezed her hand and laughed, making her break off.

"Just my little joke," he said, and finished his cup of tea. "Are you going for a stroll, or shopping?"

"I must buy some white wool for my sister, and I ought to get a few oddments," Evelyn said, and glanced at the small gilt watch on her rounded wrist; she had very clear skin, and all her movements

were graceful. “What are you going to do?”

The laughter and the drollery seemed to fade from Jim’s grey eyes.

“I am going to get a haircut,” he declared.

Evelyn burst out laughing. A dozen people were attracted, and turned to stare at her; most of them gave a quick, light-hearted smile. She looked happy. She was happy. As she hurried towards Villiers Street and the Strand, with Jim at her side, more people stared at her.

They reached the end of Villiers Street, and she said: “See you in the office, Jim,” and hurried off. He also watched her. She was one of the lucky ones, he told himself deliberately.

Face, figure, legs, ankles and hair. He could never forget her hair, the most beautiful golden colour that hair could be, striking and remarkable, and when she let it down, it reached as far as her waist. In one hectic afternoon, not long ago, she had accepted a challenge from two fellows in the office, and had let it down; Jimmy Jones could remember to this moment how every smile vanished and everyone was silent, because of the beauty of that cascade of golden hair.

Goldilocks.

Of course, everyone called her that, and occasionally it riled her; today, two passing youths had made the comment, with a kind of Teddy Boy impudence which had sparked her to annoyance.

And led to another refusal.

James Matthison Jones watched Evelyn walking off at a good pace, and wondered what would happen to her. She had such dreams of romance—dreams at least as great as his. He hoped she wouldn’t marry a man older than herself, she was the type likely to appeal to them; not exactly soft and clinging, but possessed of a great simplicity and a kind of intense honesty. In fact, he told himself that although there were times when he positively ached to have and to hold her, it would probably be a mistake to marry her, even if she was so inclined; and she would never be.

In her simplicity was a certain simpleness, a very different thing. He had known her at the office for nearly three years now, and knew her limitations, just as he believed that he knew his. They didn’t really like the same things; hers was a television, his a-book-and-armchair temperament. But for a few years it would be wonderful, and in time Forget it.

His usual barber was so busy that Jim did no more than put his head inside; three chairs and a dozen customers. The next was as busy, but nearer the Strand there was another shop, dignified by the word *Coiffure* which appeared on a hanging sign outside. Here was no barber but a hairdresser. *Ladies and Gentlemen’s Hair Beauticians,* declared a notice in the window. He stood on tip-toe, to look over the frosted glass and into the mens’ salon. Four chairs and, as far as he could see, only three men waiting; this was an expensive place, but he needed a trim, and the extra shilling wasn’t the world. Two men were waiting, after all. One of the barbers glanced up and beamed at Jim, and said:

“It will not be long, sir,” in a way which sounded like “Eet weel not be long, sair,” and went on snipping, then stood back and admired

his handiwork on a head of greying hair as if looking for the slightest blemish in the cutting. The barbers worked as if their very lives depended on it, scissors snipped and clicked and gnashed, hair fell gently to the rubber-covered floor, a man in a corner bent over a basin and a short, plump barber began to give him a shampoo.

All was normal.

On the other side of the double-fronted shop, divided three-quarters of the depth of the shop by a wooden partition, was the ladies' salmon. There were several cubicles, much whispering, much mystery, a kind of abracadabra of the coiffeur's craft. The several women, out of his sight, undoubtedly looked like space men.

Outside, people strolled or hurried. Inside, Jim closed his eyes, and hoped that it wouldn't be too long, then opened them again as the man next to him dropped a magazine on the table, and went to a newly vacated chair.

"Only one more," Jim mused, and picked up the magazine. It was small and printed on cheap paper, and the title read:

HAIR STYLIST

He turned over the pages and saw quarter-page pictures of women's hair, rather like some likely to be found in the glossy magazines, but nothing like so effective because these were printed in black and red and on newsprint. Beneath each was the descriptive style, beneath that in turn the hairdresser who had dressed the hair of the model whose picture was shown.

"There isn't one a patch on Evelyn," Jim mused, and ran the pages through quickly. He was about to drop the magazine when he saw the advertisement on the last page.

£1,000
in PRIZES

this said boldly, and beneath it in smaller type but quite clearly:

Hair Styles Competition for the Most Beautiful
HEAD OF HAIR
in Great Britain
LADIES' section GENTLEMEN'S section
Entry FREE
All particulars can be obtained
from any member of the
HAIR STYLISTS' ASSOCIATION

"You next, sir," said the Italian with the white teeth and bright smile.

"Oh, yes, thanks." Jim jumped up. He took the magazine with him, sat down, submitted to the earlier rituals, and saw his own and the beaming Italian's reflection in a tall mirror. "This beautiful hair competition," he said, "can you tell me more about it?"

"Oh, yes, with pleasure, sair. You take a leaflet." The barber stood back, surveyed Jim's silky, thinning hair and its large bald spot, and looked puzzled.

"A friend of mine might be interested," Jim said, solemnly.

"Oh, yes, sair, I quite understand," said the barber, "You take a leaflet. Everything is written down there." He began to use the clippers with that kind of exaggerated care of a barber who knows that if he ill-treated his victim's hair, it might have serious results; no infant's hair was ever cut with greater care and gentleness. "The competition is open to everyone who had hair dressed by a member of the Hair Stylists' Association, sair. It is very simple."

"Ah," thought Jim. "The snag. I wonder where Evelyn has hers done."

He continued to think about it idly as he succumbed to the ministrations of the barber who certainly knew his business. He left, twelve minutes later, taking half a dozen of the printed leaflets about the competition in his pocket, and telling himself that he was probably a fool, and that Evelyn knew all about the competition. But if she knew nothing, and it attracted her, he couldn't imagine anyone else winning.

"No, Jim," said Evelyn. "I haven't heard of it." She studied a leaflet with keen interest while she went on: "But it would be just a waste of time, I wouldn't stand a chance."

"No one would stand a chance against you," Jim asserted, and turned to one of the older girls in the office. "Rose, what'd you think?"

"It's as good as her money!"

"No, really—" Evelyn began.

"No mock modesty," Jim ordered with affected sternness. Tor the sake of the office you'll have to enter."

"Of course you will," Rose said.

"It would be crazy not to," put in a typist who had been studying the leaflet over Evelyn's shoulder. "Here, Jackie, come and tell us what you think . . . Look, you don't have to have a perm, you just have to have a set at one of these hairdressers, and they say they've members all over London . . . The one near Villiers Street is the best for you, obviously . . . George! Come and let us know what you think .. ."

Jim strolled away from the crowd round Evelyn's desk, and went to his own, in a corner. He was Deputy Office Manager, Buying and Accounts Departments of Jepsons, Mail Order Suppliers to The World. It was a quarter past two, and he ought to have stopped the discussion and got everyone back to a machine, a file or an order book, but Jepsons believed that a policy of reasonable latitude witIthe staff was wise policy. In five minutes all of the staff of this office, thirty-two people in all, were busy. It was true that Evelyn had the leaflet on her desk, but she began to type out orders from rough notes he or the Buyer had made at a bewildering speed; in front of a typewriter, she became a part of the machine. So did several of the other girls. The clatter of machines, the rustle of papers, the occasional bang of a filing drawer, the ringing of a telephone, the footsteps of clerks with roving commissions, turned this into just another afternoon.

A little before half past five, work done and powder compacts, combs and lipsticks appearing like a rash all over the office, Evelyn came across to Jim. He would be working late, and his desk was still littered with papers; his task was to check orders against invoices, and

pass the orders for payment.

"I've made up my mind," Evelyn said.

"Which way?"

"I'm going to enter."

"I want ten per cent commission!"

"I haven't a chance, but *if* there happened to be a freak result—"

"Get along, Goldilocks," said Jim, and laughed at her; and she laughed in turn, then hurried away, for the bells which released the staff here and in the dozens of offices of the Jepson Building were ringing, and the staircases, landings, lifts and passages suddenly swarmed with people. Except for the occasional late worker, like Jim, the offices were occupied only by ghosts.

It was nearly half past six when Jim left, on a lovely evening. He could stroll along the Embankment, or through the gardens, or could go up Villiers Street towards the Strand as he usually did. He felt not only at a loose end, but deeply depressed. Evelyn's bluntness had acted like a blow from a bludgeon, and forced him to accept the fact that he had no hope. It had not really helped to tell himself that marriage with her wouldn't have worked, that their tastes differed, that her simplicity and sweetness would soon cloy. It was not much use, either, trying to persuade himself that he would soon get over it.

Meanwhile, he had the evening on his hands, for he had intended to ask Evelyn to have supper and go to a film with him. He was on his own too much. Comfortable digs, a landlady who spoiled him, a sufficient salary—enough to marry and raise a family on, if he were careful—but apart from that, he told himself his was an aimless kind of existence. He had never been a club man, preferring books and browsing, but at twenty-eight he felt a stronger and stronger urge for company, and until today he had persuaded himself that Evelyn's resistance could be worn down.

He did not think that now.

At least if she won that competition she would have reason to bless his name.

He smiled wryly, and found himself going towards the barbers. There were the hanging signs, the notices in the window and, standing at the corner nearby, the Italian barber. The man not only recognised but seemed positively pleased to see him.

"Good evening, sir!"

"Hallo," said Jim, and smiled briefly. "Good night."

"Good night to you, sir!"

Over effusive, Jim thought idly, and walked a little more briskly on. It did not occur to him that he was being followed.

CHAPTER TWO
The Shadow

Across the street from the corner where the Italian barber had stood and behaved so effusively was a small, lean man, wearing a neat grey suit and a trilby hat pulled down over one eye. He had a cigarette in his mouth, and put his hand to take it away as the barber began to speak.

A little further along another man leaned against a shop window, and was also smoking. He was massive, with a thick neck and packed shoulders, dressed in a dark brown suit, and his trilby hat was centred on his head. This man did not hear the barber, and could only see his back, but he saw the smaller man move suddenly, and observed that he moved after Jim. The small man and the big one drew level.

"That is him," the little man said.

"Feller with the bald patch?"

"Yeh."

"Okay."

"Don't let him get away."

"No one gets away from me," said the bull-like man in the brown suit. He nodded, and turned after Jim Jones, who had noticed the other man, but thought nothing of it, then.

The barber had disappeared, towards the Embankment.

For the rest, there was nothing unusual about the evening. The homeward rush hour was over, the queues outside the Corner House were diminishing, the Strand itself was not really crowded. Nelson stared blindly and blandly over London.

And Jim had acquired a shadow.

He could turn left, towards Trafalgar Square, where a few people were still feeding the pigeons, where the fountains played, and sightseers ambled, but that was too aimless. He could turn right along the Strand, but there were only the shops. He could go and have a meal in one of the restaurants, but was in no mood to eat on his own. It would be much better to get home to his books and the radio; his landlady would get a meal for him very quickly, and once in his own room he could probably put the depression out of his mind. His lodgings were in Chelsea, not far from Sloane Square; he could walk or go by bus. In the mood of the evening, he could not really make up his mind what to do.

A Number 11 bus came along.

He got on.

Two girls, an elderly couple, a coloured man and a tall, massive man in brown also got on. Jim went upstairs; the man in brown went inside, and sat near the door.

The journey to Sloane Square allowed time for smoking a cigarette and a half. Jim stubbed out the half as he got up, clambered down the stairs, and stepped off; just ahead of him was the tall man in the brown suit, who had also jumped up in a hurry, as if he had only just realised that this was his stopping place.

It was ten minutes' walk to Middleton Street, which was off the main road, and Jim stepped out more briskly. He noticed the massive

man in brown some way ahead of him, then saw the man slow down to look into a shop window, and let him pass. It did not occur to him that the man was virtually his shadow. Even when the other turned down Middleton Street in his wake, Jim took no notice.

He reached Number 24 a little after a quarter past seven, and pressed the bell although he had his key in his hand; Mrs. Blake liked him to ring, so that she knew who had come in. She would be approaching from the kitchen doorway as he opened the door, with her pleasant welcome, and her invariable:

"I expect you're starved, I'll soon have something ready for you. Just go up and have a little wash."

He would go up . . .

He opened the door with his key, and was surprised because there was no movement from the kitchen, and only silence in the house.

If she was going to be out, Mrs. Blake usually told him before he left in the morning; she was remarkably a creature of habit, and since she had acquired a television set, had seldom gone out in the evening.

Ah. It was later than usual, and the television was on. Jim grinned to himself, but a moment later decided that he was wrong; he would have heard voices or music, had that been the case.

He called out: "You home, Mrs. Blake?" There was no answer.

* * *

Had he gone upstairs then, as he usually did, and into his front room bed-sitter, he would probably have looked out of the window, and seen the tall man in brown meet the small man in the neat grey suit and the trilby pulled over one eye; but instead, he went along to the kitchen.

* * *

The television set, in a corner, was as blank as an empty window. The large kitchen was scrupulously clean and tidy, there was a green chenille table cloth over the large deal table, the wooden chairs were all varnished; and there was an appetising smell coming from the stove. On the dark green cloth was a note:

The telly's out of order so I've popped next door to see the play, dinner's in the oven and help yourself to anything you feel like. Mrs. B. There are some of those new rock cakes you like in the big red tin in the larder.

Jim grinned.

He raided the larder, helped himself to Mrs. Blake's rock cakes, which were the perfection of simple baking, then went upstairs. He strolled to the window, as he nearly always did, partly because if there were any letters for him he would find them on the table in the window. There was none. He looked out. Across the road, walking briskly, was a little man whom he did not remember having seen before; the little man glanced up, almost as if he was aware of being watched, but quickly looked down again, and went straight on.

Jim took off his coat and hung it on the back of a chair, went into the bathroom, washed, and began to whistle to himself. He was feeling a little less glum, and the cake had whetted his appetite. Still whistling, he hurried down the stairs. He was surprised by his return

to cheerfulness, and dryly inferred that his feeling for Evelyn could not go really deep. He took the meal out of the oven, an ample one obviously served at lunch-time. It was very hot, and he winced when his thumb caught the side of the dish. The gravy had dried to dark brown round the edge, but when he took the vegetable dish lid off, steam rose up in a cloud; yet it did not look dry.

He put it on the wooden mat which Mrs. Blake had provided, and began to eat, cautiously at first. He propped up the newspaper against a pot of jam, and glanced through the headlines which he had already seen that morning; the international news was so-so, the home news was of further crises. Cheerful world!

He was halfway through, and eating more quickly because the food had cooled, when there was a ring at the front door.

"Oh, damn," he said mildly, and pushed his chair back and went along, dabbing at his lips with his table-napkin, which he dropped on to the hall-stand. He could see the shadow of a girl behind the two glass panels set in the upper part of the door, and wondered if Mrs. Blake had left her key, and had come to see if he was in.

He opened the door.

A girl he had never seen before said: "Good evening."

She had a slightly Cockney voice and an ingratiating manner, and a smile he didn't much like. She was made up more than most, which spoiled rather than improved a kind of everyday prettiness. She wore a red hat and a pink coat, a clash which even Jim didn't fail to notice.

"Good evening," he said.

"Is Betty Driver in, please?"

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I'm afraid you have the wrong house, no Betty Driver lives here."

"Oh," she said, and her face dropped and she looked younger and woebegone. Then she backed away and looked up at the number painted on the fanlight, a clear, black 24 in letters six inches high. She looked back at him. "This *is* number 24, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, but I assure you—"

"But she *must* live here, she told me she did!"

Jim would have laughed, but for that little look of dismay and distress. There was no one named Driver here, and he was quite sure that Mrs. Blake would not have taken another lodger without first telling him.

"I'm awfully sorry."

"But—but it's absurd, she *told* me."

"I'm sorry," Jim repeated more briskly, "but Mr. and Mrs. Blake live here, and neither of them is in just now. I'm the only other occupant of 24 Middleton Street, and my name isn't Driver, it's Jones."

"Jones?" She seemed to breathe her disbelief into the name.

"James Matthison Jones," he repeated firmly. "I'm sorry I can't help you."

"Oh, well," she said, as if she wasn't really convinced. "Well—oh, well, all right, I'm sorry to have bothered you."

"It's no bother," Jim said, and waited until she had turned away and was on the pavement, before he closed the door. He gave a mirthless kind of laugh as he went back to the kitchen, sat down and

discovered that he'd forgotten the table-napkin, and decided to make do without it. The food which had been so hot was now almost too cold, but he finished it, and pulled a dish of apples and custard towards him. He was weighing into the rock cakes again when there was another ring at the front door bell.

"Well, this is a night for callers," he said, and went along quickly. It crossed through his mind that the girl might have come back, but the shadow against the glass was of a tall man.

He opened the door.

He recognised the massive man who had been on the bus, had first gone ahead and later turned the corner behind him, but he did not think beyond that; there was no outward cause for fear.

"Good evening," he said.

"Your name Jones?"

"Yes."

Jim had never seen anyone move more quickly. The man shot out a fist and thumped him on the nose. The blow sent him staggering, and the pain brought tears flooding to his eyes. He banged up against the wall. He heard the door slam, and could just make out the figure of the tall man, blurred through those tears. He put up clenched fists and struck out, but it was like striking a whirlwind. He felt a cruel blow at the side of his jaw, pain which no ordinary knuckles could have caused streaked through his cheek and head. He took another blow on the chest, so fierce and savage that he cried out.

Gasping and struggling, he tried to back away. The misty blur in front of his eyes was tinged red, and he felt as if every breath was tearing him apart. Then one blow smacked his head against the wall so heavily that he grunted, and lost consciousness.

He slumped down.

The tall man, who was breathing evenly and whose trilby was still firmly on his head, bent down and dragged him to one side, then opened the door. The little man was on the pavement, and he came hurrying in.

The door closed.

The little man looked down and said: "You've made a mess of him all right."

"Go and lock the back door, too," the massive man said. "We don't want to be interrupted, do we?" He did not even glance at the unconscious man behind the door, but worked a brass knuckle duster off his right hand, smearing knuckles and fingers with blood as he did so.

The little man came back.

"Door's locked," he announced. "And Milly will ring the bell if anyone comes."

"Okay, let's get a move on," the other said. "We'll have a quick look round first, and then we'll make it look as if they've had a visit from an atom bomb."

As he spoke, he grinned, and the grin was not nice to see.

And outside, the girl who had come to find whether Jim Jones was alone in the house sat waiting for them in a small car.

CHAPTER THREE
Visitor For The Toff

The Honourable Richard Rollison, known to so many as the Toff, and who much preferred to be known as plain Mr. Rollison, read about the attack on James Matthison Jones in the newspaper the next morning, together with a number of other reports from the twentieth-century world of peace and goodwill. An old lady had been beaten up in her shop and robbed of three pounds ten shillings, seven youths had set upon one youth and his girl in a cinema, and the youth and the girl were in hospital—as was the man named Jones. There were other crimes of violence, both in London and nearby, and one or two stories of little incidents in Glasgow did not exactly brighten the morning's newspapers.

He was at breakfast.

It was ten o'clock.

His worst friend must have admitted that he looked remarkably clear-eyed and clear-skinned for a man of forty-ish who had not come home until half past three; and they would also have admitted that whenever a woman called him handsome, the woman was right. It was a casual handsomeness at this moment, for although he had not shaved he had bathed. His hair was damp and curling more than usual and, if the truth were told, looking a little more grey at the sides than of yore. He read without glasses, and ate bacon and eggs and then toast and marmalade with the single-minded attention of the true English trencherman to whom breakfast was the foundation of a successful day.

Jolly, his man, came in from the kitchen with freshly made coffee. Some said that Jolly had obtained his post because in his far-off youthful days, Rollison had indulged a naive sense of humour, and Jolly had rhymed with Rolly. Whatever the truth of that, Jolly was now twenty-one years older. In those twenty-one years this flat, at Gresham Terrace in the heart of Mayfair, had seen some remarkable sights. It had also received some astounding visitors, many of them young and lovely, and had been redecorated five times, the last twelve months ago. The large walnut desk which seemed to fill one side of the room had not been changed; most of the pictures were old friends of the Toff and of Jolly, too, but the most remarkable thing that had happened in those twenty-one years was visible on the Trophy Wall.

This wall, behind the desk, was like a Black Museum from some unchronicled Scotland Yard. Here were all the exhibits the police could ever expect to find in trials of murder and general wickedness, and a few that no one would expect. For instance, the nylon stocking with a run sealed by nail varnish; and the chicken feathers, and the top hat with a bullet hole in the crown. Most of the trophies were lethal weapons, however, ranging from automatic pistols to knives, and poisons, and the *piece de resistance* was a hangman's rope. The knowledgeable whispered that this had really hanged a man: when asked, the Toff always said of course it had, he kept nothing synthetic here.

Each trophy was from a case on which he had worked; some,

from cases on which he had nearly died. A few came from investigations where he had actually worked with the approval and the blessing of the police. Most of these were of recent date, for either the Toff or the police had mellowed, and he had always had one supporter at the Yard, in Superintendent William Grice.

Superintendent Grice, according to three of the five newspapers which Rollison glanced through, was in charge of the investigation into the attack on James Matthison Jones at 24 Middleton Street, S.W.

Jolly poured out coffee while Rollison read, and turned to leave, silent as any wraith. When he was at the door, Rollison murmured:

"Jolly."

"Sir?"

"How are you this morning?"

"Very well, sir, thank you."

"Good. Mind working?"

Jolly, coffee pot in hand, turned back to the breakfast table, which stood in a window alcove, overlooking other houses and other flats; the street window was on the other side of the room.

"As far as I know, sir." He was cautious. "Read the newspapers?"

"I have perused them lightly, sir."

"You mean you've read every line under the heading of crime. What strikes you as being odd?"

"Mr. Grice being engaged on the matter of the assault at Middleton Street," Jolly answered promptly.

"Why is that odd?"

"One would have expected the Divisional police to deal with such a matter, sir, not Scotland Yard, and certainly not a senior Superintendent."

"You couldn't be more right," agreed Rollison, and pushed his chair back and took cigarettes from his dressing gown pocket. "Jolly," he went on, "I have a confession to make. I have been dreaming beautiful dreams. I am tired of the sordidness of the Big Smoke or the Great Metropolis, whichever you prefer to call it. I long for the freshness of unsullied crimes, where young men do not get bashed over the head and old women are not murdered for a few bob a time, and gangs of hooligans do not set upon a boy and girl, simply because the boy, once one of them, has fallen in love with the girl. I do not think that I am greatly taken by this modern age, Jolly, particularly on a morning like this. Is it my imagination, or is London much, much worse than it was?"

Jolly kept a rigidly straight face except for the movement of his lips.

"It is your imagination, sir."

Rollison eyed him thoughtfully, and then said: "Oh, is it? For that you may spend today looking out the newspapers of the—what date is it?"

"May the seventeenth, sir."

"May the seventeenth of each of the last twenty-one years. We'll have the *Globe,* the *Wire,* the *Sun-Record* and *The Times, just* to get a balanced view, and we shall count the number of new crimes reported on each day of each year. You may go to the newspaper offices in person."

"Thank you, sir," said Jolly. "Would you like more coffee?"

"Please."

Jolly poured.

"Will you excuse me now, sir?"

"Yes."

"Thank you, sir. May I ask whether you have read this morning's newspapers?"

This time, Rollison was silently speculative for a long time. So far neither master nor man had allowed himself to smile, each remaining quite poker-faced. Whenever they played a game like this, it was seldom that either relaxed. Rollison studied Jolly, with the sorrowful-looking brown eyes, the rather wrinkled skin, the scragginess under the chin which suggested that he had once been fat but had recently wasted away. Jolly's lips were sensitive, and although there was a kind of dyspeptic look about him, his was a face that most people liked.

"Yes," said Rollison at last. "I have perused the newspapers."

"Did you observe the name of the employer of the man, Jones?"

Slowly and as if painfully, Rollison said: "No."

"I imagined that had escaped your notice," said Jolly, magnificently bland. "In the *Globe,* sir, it states that Jones worked for Jepsons. Possibly only the *Globe* carried that piece of information, because Jepsons own many shares in the *Globe."*

"Yes, indeed," said Rollison, and did relax and chuckle. "All right, your game, Jolly. The chap works for Jepsons. Where do we go from here?"

"I have no idea, sir."

"Except that if the Jepsons have a problem they'll probably bring it to us," said Rollison, and stubbed out his cigarette. "Do we need to labour for our pieces of gold?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much in the kitty?"

"Sufficient, sir, but a wise man—"

"Sets some aside for a rainy day. I know. No holiday in distant climes where there's no time at all for crimes?"

"A short visit to Barbados, sir, might be advantageous."

"Enough," said Rollison. "I know we've been offered a fabulous fee to go to the West Indies and look for a missing millionaire, and I know you've had a lifelong ambition to visit those little islands off the coast of the U.S.A., but no thank you, not at this time of the year. There's too much sun, too much temperature, too many lovelies and too many distractions. We might have a weekend at Blackpool, or if you feel the need for more rarefied air, at Bournemouth. If Mr. Jepson should come, I'll see him."

* * *

Mr. Jepson did not come that day.

The evening newspapers, and the morning and evening newspapers of the next three days all reported the condition of James Matthison Jones. At first, there were hints that he might die, but on the morning of the fourth day he was reported as being out of danger. No arrest was made.

Rollison made a few tentative inquiries, simply out of interest.

On the morning of the fifth day Miss, not Mr. Jepson, came to see him.

* * *

"Rolly, it's sweet of you to suggest lunch but I really can't today. I'm a Big Business woman now, and you ought to know it. And Reggie isn't at the office today."

Ada Jepson was a little on the small side, beautifully made-up and superbly dressed, and Rollison knew that she had as pleasant a nature as anyone in England. She had a heart-shaped face and a nice smile and dimples, too. Sweet and simple—until one tried to cheat, mislead, misinform or otherwise outrage her sense of justice. She had the most withering tongue of any young woman of Rollison's acquaintance. "I really came to see you on business," she went on.

She smiled as she sat dwarfed in his hide armchair, with the trophy wall behind her. Rollison was sitting on the arm of another chair. It was a little after eleven o'clock, and Jolly would soon bring coffee.

"Ah," said Rollison. "I am a professional, remember. Jolly insists. My services will cost you a fortune."

"Oh, that doesn't matter!"

"So now we flaunt our riches," murmured R ollison.

"If you mean that I believe you're a fool if you can get what you want by paying for it, but don't, then I'm flaunting my riches," agreed Ada. "Not that it matters. No money in the world would buy your services if you didn't want to give them. I'll soon talk to Jolly about money, if you'll say you'll help. I *do* hope you will."

"I might," conceded Rollison.

"You don't know what it's about yet."

"I could make a guess. The police are helpless and hopeless. That man Grice is utterly impossible, how on earth he even became one of the Big Five at Scotland Yard you can't imagine. We wouldn't have him in the packing department at Jepsons. And it's really such a simple thing, all he has to do is find the men who attacked poor Jimmy Jones. The brutes. If beasts like these men can get away, absolutely nothing's safe. Women will soon be afraid to open the front doors to strangers!"

Ada listened to all this while slowly clenching her small right fist; then shook it at him in mock anger.

"You've been talking to Reggie."

"Not I."

"That man Grice, then."

"Well, we had a chat over a tankard," admitted Rollison. "Jolly and I half expected you'd want quick results, and didn't think you'd have much luck."

"Oh, indeed," said Ada, and added witheringly. "I'm sorry I'm so late." She was frowning with exasperation, but her expression soon cleared. She leaned forward, earnest as a woman could be, looking fresh and lovely.

Rollison wondered if her earnestness explained why no one had yet married her. More likely she was trying to make sure that no one married her for her millions.

"Rolly, I know Jimmy Jones quite well," she said. "He's one of the

best of the younger men at the firm, and we've been letting him have an insight into all the departments, although he doesn't know why yet. Reggie thinks he can become really good, if he recovers."

"He will."

Will he really be quite all right again?" Ada asked, intently. "Or will it affect him for the rest of his life? I've been studying some of the reports of this kind of beating up, and in several cases the victims have become almost simple."

"I don't think you need worry about Jones," said Rollison reassuringly. "I've a contact at the hospital who says that he'll recover completely. His chief trouble will be resisting the desire to get his own back."

"Well, I wouldn't blame him," Ada said, and went on abruptly: "Why didn't you expect Superintendent Grice to find the two men?"

It was like Ada Jepson to go straight to the heart of a matter, without hesitation and without fencing, to see the significance of every question or comment; one had to get up very early to fool Ada.

Rollison was as frank as she deserved.

"If this had been an ordinary beating up, robbery with violence, Grice wouldn't have been called in. You at Jepsons might have pulled some strings at the Yard to get a Superintendent, but Grice was on the job before you'd had time to—probably before you knew what had happened. So it wasn't ordinary robbery with violence. Nor was it the first of its kind. During the past five weeks six other cases of assault have been reported, and no one has yet been arrested. The results have all been the same: a savage attack on an individual in his home, and then the home has been systematically wrecked. In this case, nothing breakable was left. According to one report there wasn't even a cup and saucer left whole. From television set to a tea plate, everything was smashed to smithereens, and still nobody knows why. But today or tomorrow your Jimmy Jones will be able to make a statement. That may be a starting point."

Ada contemplated Rollison with great solemnity, and then asked almost humbly:

"*Will* you try to find out why it happened?"

"Yes," said Rollison, smiling. "I can't think of anything that would keep me away."

Ada jumped up.

"Oh, bless you!"

"Before you start blessing me or anyone else, tell me this," said Rollison softly. "Do you know anything more at all—about this man Jones, or what lies behind the trouble?"

"Of course I don't."

"Nothing wrong at any of your offices or warehouses?"

Ada looked so taken aback that he believed her when she said no, as far as she was aware there was no trouble at all at Jepsons. She looked as if this was a new idea entirely, and that it worried her. But one could never be sure with Ada.

"I've never heard of anything, Rolly, but the truth is that we've got too big, you know. That sounds a ridiculous thing to say, but you know we've expanded a lot in the last few years, don't you?"

"Under the direction of our Ada. Jepsons' Mail Order, the Biggest

in Britain. Jepsons' Manufacturies, making everything from pots and pans to motor-car tyres—there's a rumour in the city that you're going to produce a People's Car. Right?"

"We might, one day," Ada admitted.

"I want a free sample," Rollison said.

"Jepsons' Wholesale—suppliers to retailers all over the world. Yes, you're pretty big, Ada. Why keep expanding?"

"Well, somehow the business grows," Ada said. "We've some very good directors in all the subsidiary firms. But I've never heard of any trouble, Rolly. Oh, my goodness, look at the time! I must fly."

Rollison watched her leave the house. By pressing close against the window and looking into the street, he saw her step off the pavement and into her high-powered, scarlet sports car. She looked almost childlike as she sat at the wheel; and then, zooooom! and the car roared towards the corner.

She slowed down in good time.

"And no one followed her," said Rollison to Jolly. "That's almost a disappointment. Get Grice on the line, will you, and ask him if he can see me in about half an hour. Tell him I'm on my way."

"Supposing he isn't free, sir?"

"Don't tell me you're slipping," said Rollison. "Persuade him not to keep me waiting too long."

CHAPTER FOUR
Gentle Hint

Grice not only received him but was affable; so affable that Rollison began to suspect the reason before he had been in the building for five minutes. It was a pleasant office with a view of the Thames and the Embankment. On this warm morning, the sun was bright, and everything in sight was beautiful when one looked out of the window. Inside, Grice was not exactly a beauty; but he was striking-looking, tall, brown-clad, brown hair turning grey, brown eyes as sharp as they had been in all the years Rollison had known him. The skin showed white where it was stretched tight over the bony bridge of his nose.

,. . . not really surprised you've taken an interest in this case," he said, "and I couldn't wish you more luck. It's a brutal business. Apart from the violence, there's the deliberate wrecking of homes. That old couple in Chelsea probably won't recover from the shock. They've been married forty-one years, and among the things broken were some wedding presents. Everything they'd saved was in that house, and—phutt, they lost it in half an hour."

"Insured?"

"No."

Rollison kept quiet for a moment, and then asked:

"How many homes broken up like it?"

"Seven now."

"So the newspapers got that right," murmured Rollison. Till, it isn't often you welcome me with open arms. Were you hoping I might look in about this job?"

"Yes," said Grice promptly. "In fact, I wanted to call and ask you to look in, but—"

"The boss said no," suggested Rollison, narrowing his eyes and putting his head on one side. "You want me in, you've got six similar cases on the record, you were at Middleton Street yourself within a few hours of the job being done, yet you couldn't catch anyone. Add all that together, and I suspect you know who's behind it but can't pick him up."

"Unofficially," said Grice, "you're right."

"Sure of him?"

"Them."

"Who are they?"

"It will interest you to know that we checked up on Tiny Wallis and Mick Clay, but their alibis were so perfect that no one in his right mind would believe it. The court, judge and jury would have to accept it as evidence, though. That hint broad enough for you?"

"So gentle," mused Rollison. "Any idea why Jones was singled out?"

"No, and he swears he doesn't know. He has a good reputation, and there's no reason to think he's lying."

"Hm. The other six cases?"

"We've checked them all closely but haven't found any connection, except that they're indirectly associated with the firm of Jepsons," said Grice, "although I'm pretty sure there is another link.

Every victim says he's no idea why he was attacked. If they're lying, we haven't been able to prove it." He put his hand on a pile of manilla folders on the desk. "Here is a full account of every one, there's no reason why you shouldn't look at them. You could get the information from any newspaper office if you put your mind to it."

"Thanks for saving me the trouble," murmured Rollison. "May I . . . ?"

He studied the cases for nearly an hour, and when he left Grice's office, did not go straight to Gresham Terrace. At the wheel of a demure grey and cream Rolls-Bentley, at that juncture his favourite motor car, he drove along the Embankment, the narrow thronged streets of the City, and through the noisy, bustling brashness of the East End. He attracted more and more attention the poorer the neighbourhood, and was making people gape by the time he reached the Blue Dog, in the Mile End Road. It was nearly one o'clock. When he went into the saloon bar of the pub, leaving the magnificent motor car outside, a throng of boys and youths promptly surrounded it, and a policeman kept a protective eye on it from a corner.

Behind the bar was an enormous man wearing pincenez, serving pints of beer in pewter tankards and half pints in glasses, while a youth and a little man with a twisted nose served drinks at the other end; and with the drinks, pork pies, cheese rolls and sandwiches. Everything was normal and everyone seemed to be talking at once when the door opened to admit Rollison. From the moment he entered, the silence was so complete that the big man, Bill Ebbutt, looked up to see what it was all about. He was near-sighted, and peered intently before recognising Rollison. Then he gave an expansive grin, and rumbled:

"Always a pleasure to see you, Mr. Ar! Come on private business or a snifter?" He would drop his work behind the bar and give all his time to Rollison, if it were necessary.

"Later, Bill," said Rollison, reaching the bar; and they shook hands. "I happened to be passing, and felt like some of your pork pies."

"Help yourself," said Ebbutt. "What are you going to wash 'em down with?"

"Still keep that 4 X?"

"Don't be daft," said Ebbutt, "arf me business is with 4 X." He took down a tankard, pulled a handle, and placed a foaming head of the beer in front of Rollison. Then he turned to a small man who had been waiting patiently for several minutes. "Your turn now, Charlie, and give Mr. Ar elbow room, there's a good little boy."

He served and wheezed and sweated, the saloon bar became more crowded and the smell of beer became much more pronounced. Then he said in a whisper which only Rollison could hear:

"Anyfink you want?"

"Bill," said Rollison, in a loud, clear voice, "I am interested in a gentleman named Tiny Wallis and another named Mick Clay."

For the second time in the past twenty minutes a hush fell upon all the people present, and into the hush a worried Bill Ebbutt said:

"You be careful, Mr. Ar, that Wallis is a killer, and Clay ain't far behind."

"Oh, they're just a couple of blowhards," said Rollison casually, and bit into a pie from which the jelly oozed enticingly. "Liz still make these with her own fair hands, Bill?"

"Never mind the pies," Ebbutt said urgently, "Don't you go and take chances with that pair, and whatever you do, don't under-rate them, Mr. Ar. I'm see-rious." He looked not only serious but solemn, and lowered his voice for greater effect. "You watch your step and don't go an' forget it."

Rollison looked at him straightly, and when no one else could possibly see, gave the plainest of winks.

". . . and from what the police have told me, I can't understand why you let them worry you," he went on, quite regardless. "Wallis is the big shot and Clay's his yes-man, isn't that the set-up? Can you tell me where to find the pair?"

"No, Mr. Ar, I can't, and that's flat."

"Can but won't," mused Rollison, and finished the pie and quaffed his beer, took another pie and completely changed the subject. "Why don't you bring Liz over for an hour or so this weekend, Bill? It's a good time. Jolly will be away and I'm on my own. Don't know of a really good daily, do you?"

Ebbutt said huskily: "No, Mr. Ar, not one who'd come as far as your place every day. I'll ask Liz, and if she can come it'll be a pleasure. Friday's the best day for me."

"Day after tomorrow," said Rollison blandly, and looked about him, as if he was completely at peace with the world and thoroughly enjoying life. He leaned forward so that his ear was close to Ebbutt, and he heard the big man whisper:

"Now you've done it, Mr. Ar, nothing will keep 'em away. Would you like a couple of my chaps?"

"No, Bill," Rollison said. "If I get any visitors, I'd like to welcome them myself." He beamed and winked again, looked longingly at another pie, but slowly shook his head. Then with great precision he spoke so that only Ebbutt could hear. "You and your boys keep out of it for the time being, Bill. I'll telephone if I want any help."

"I dunno that I like it," Ebbutt grumbled, "but I suppose you know what you're doing.

Another "arf o' mild, Charlie? Okay. "Am sandwich, yessir." He toiled and drew the beer and watched over his customers, knowing which were aching to carry the news of the Toffs braggadocio to Tiny Wallis and Micky Clay.

It would not be long before the couple heard of it.

"Going straight back after this, Mr. Ar?" asked Ebbutt, into a lull.

"One or two calls to make first," said Rollison. "I'll be back home by about four." He grinned at Ebbutt, paid his dues and then strolled out, nodding right and left and lording it much more than anyone here had known the Toff lord it before. Many were his friends and most respected him, but there was an uneasy silence while he went out. As soon as the doors swung to behind him, they all began to talk so fast that Ebbutt could not hear the orders.

Every man there believed that the Toff, having asked for trouble, would get it very soon.

* * *

Rollison strolled across to his car, where the youngsters still stood, mostly in awe, but from which the youths had gone. That was surprising. He went to have a word with an old acquaintance at a corner shop; when he came back two men whom he had not noticed before were standing near the car. He took the wheel and started the engine, doing everything with great deliberation, and then moved off slowly towards the docks and the small mean streets, where a Rolls-Royce or a Rolls-Bentley were like red rags to a bull. For here was poverty, even in this age of the welfare state; here was envy, too, and greed and malice—as well as friends, because many people here owed a great deal to the Toff.

He was followed by one of the two men on a motor-bicycle, which kept about fifty yards behind. He could see the man in his driving mirror all the time. He still drove slowly, and was very watchful, for although he had asked for trouble, he did not know which way it was likely to come.

Then he heard the sound of a powerful truck engine, not far away. He peered along the narrow, drab street, and saw two youths at a corner. He could not be sure, but believed that these were the youths who had been outside the Blue Dog, showing such interest in the car.

One of the youths disappeared, waving to someone who was out of sight.

The motor-cyclist put on a burst of speed, so as to draw level with the Rolls-Bentley, and roared past without a glance at Rollison; but as soon as he was ahead, he swung across the big car.

Rollison had to jam on his brakes.

The roar of the unseen truck engine was deafening.

Rollison was within ten yards of the corner and there was little room in the narrow road. He saw the front of a huge lorry sweep round the corner on the wrong side of the road; and fear welled up in him, because death was so near.

In a vivid moment of understanding, he knew that the motor-cyclist was in his way to prevent him from putting his foot down, and hurtling the car out of danger. The lorry was so far over that it left no room for him to pull up to safety; and if he stopped he would be crushed to death.

He saw the driver at the lorry cabin, high above him, the huge wheels, the quivery bonnet; it was like the mouth of a great beast eager to snatch and mangle him. The motor-cyclist was looking over his shoulder, grinning, so sure he had played his part. He was right in Rollison's path, in the way of deliverance.

Rollison's body was at a great tension as he accelerated. Even the Rolls-Bentley engine roared, and the grin was wiped off the motor-cyclist's face. The truck driver vanished from Rollison's sight, only his hands could be seen, twisting at the wheel as if determined to smash the sleek beauty of the car's lines.

Rollison judged his moment, and swung hard to the right.

The front of the lorry missed the tail of the car by inches. The whole of Rollison's driving mirror was filled with the huge green sides and the turning grinding wheels. He could hear the brakes screeching, the beast robbed of its prey. The motor-cyclist tried desperately to get

out of the way, Rollison tried as desperately to miss him, but he could not. The Rolls-Bentley's bumper caught the back of the machine, and sent it hurtling to one side. The driver pitched up in the air and then crashed down. He fell so close to the front of the car that for a moment Rollison thought he had run over him, but there was no jolt.

There was just the empty street ahead, a few people at the windows, their faces transfixed in horror; the small, grey houses and the dead street lamps, and a long way off, the blank wall of a warehouse. That was all.

The lorry was steady now, but racing away from the corner, the motor-cyclist, and Rollison. In his mirror, Rollison could see the smashed machine and the inert figure on the ground. Then a woman approached him from one of the little houses, first walking, then hurrying. He stopped the car at the kerb, sat for a moment with sweat icy on his forehead, then he got out and walked quickly back. There was no sign of the youths, and the lorry had disappeared round a far corner. In the distance, near the Blue Dog, a crowd seemed to be staring this way, and a policeman came hurrying.

The woman was bending over the motor-cyclist.

Rollison felt nausea, and was touched with the chill of horror. There was blood on the man's face and on one hand, and he lay so still that he might be dead. The strange thing was the silence from the nearby houses, from which the women stared from their windows; and the silence of the woman now kneeling by the side of the man who lay so still.

Rollison asked heavily: "How is he?" as he joined her.

She looked up, a little woman with thin features and a spiteful face. Her lips were twisted viciously and her eyes were full of hate, and she spat at him:

"He's dead and you killed him! Murderer, that's what you are. *Murderer!* You ought to be strung up."

As her words fell on the sunlit air, another woman came out of the little doorway of her tiny house and took up the accusing cry.

"Murderer!" she screamed at him. *"Murderer!"*

Another shout came and another. There were men's voices as well as women's, youth's as well as men's. Never in his life had Rollison felt such menace or known a greater fear.

Then dozens of youths appeared at a corner, and came slowly, menacingly, towards him.

CHAPTER FIVE
MOB

The Toff could run away.

There was both time and opportunity. The youths were coming from the corner where the lorry had turned, and the car was facing away from them in the other direction. Two or three women and several toddlers were between Rollison and the car, but he could reach it in time to get away; despite their menace the youths were too far off to prevent him.

Or the Toff could stay and face it out.

He knew what that could mean, what it probably would mean. These youths weren't maddened by the accident, as the woman was; they had come to set upon him when his car had smashed against the truck, in case the job needed finishing. They had lain in wait. Now they had a perfect excuse for going wild, the excuse that they had turned on a motorist for killing one of their friends. No one could argue. No one could support Rollison's story, for any who would speak for him were too far behind. Before they could come to his aid, it would be all over.

So he could face it out and end up in hospital, like Jimmy Jones; unless he ended up in a morgue.

The first woman was spitting her spite at him, others were joining in, the youths were drawing nearer. They weren't coming quickly. They were wary, of course, there was a kind of cloak about the Toff, the protecting shield of his reputation. In the East End the name Toff was a byword, and many were frightened of him.

If he ran away, none would ever be frightened again. A reputation built up over twenty years, and which had survived challenge upon challenge, could fade away like a wisp of steam if he turned his back on this mob of youths.

All these things passed through his mind in flashes, like electric sparks. The shrill voices of the women made a background of sound, as did the shuffling of the feet of the youths who were drawing nearer. He saw three youths quicken their pace, and go behind him; they were to cut off his retreat. If he was going to run, this was his last chance.

He needed a means of attack. Not with fists and not with weapons, not even with words. He turned with swift decisiveness upon the woman near the fallen motor-cyclist, and those who were supporting her. His face was set and bleak, and she got up and backed away, as if afraid that he would strike her. He went down on one knee beside the motor-cyclist, a man in his twenties. His forehead was raw and bleeding, the back of his right hand was lacerated, and blood was trickling down his lips. Rollison grasped his left wrist, feeling for the pulse, and stared down into the pallid face, as if he had no other thought in the world and it did not even occur to him that this mob would attack him.

He looked up.

The advance guard of the youths were only a few yards away.

"This man isn't dead," Rollison said crisply. "He's got a good chance if we hurry. Who has a bike?" One youth opened his mouth as

if to say "I have' and Rollison didn't wait for him to change his mind. "You go and see if Dr. Scott's in, quick. If he's not, get Dr. Murphy. Anyone else here with a bike?" No one answered this time, and the first youth hesitated. Then Rollison recognised a little whippet of a boy, not vicious but easily led, and one of the fastest milers in the East End of London. "Here, Rolly, you beat all Olympic records up to the Blue Dog, the nearest telephone. Dial 999 and ask for an ambulance. Let's see if you can still run!"

The youths wavered.

One of the women shouted at them: "What are you standing there for?"

That worked the miracle.

The youths turned and hurried, Rolly to run like a deer, with nothing in his mind but accepting the challenge, the other to leap on his bicycle as if his life depended on it, and pedal off furiously.

Rollison turned to the woman who had come first, and who was now silent.

"Do you live just here?"

She gave a quick, reluctant kind of nod, as if surprised into acknowledging the question.

"Wonderful! Get some blankets and a couple of hot water bottles, and put a couple of kettles on. They might come in useful." Rollison was still on one knee beside the injured man, and he looked back at him as if taking it for granted that the woman would obey.

She did.

The danger had passed.

Whoever had urged and almost certainly bribed this East End mob to help against the Toff, had lost the first round. Vicious, spiteful-looking youths, young brutes in a gang and in the right mood, were simply people. Crazy mixed-up kids? Young fools, who needed sharp treatment and firm discipline, who had as much good as bad in them if only it could be brought out. They began to move away, the threatening circle had broken already. The women were back in their houses, and soon one came running with a bright red eiderdown, which looked like the blood of a dozen men as the sunlight streamed upon it. She put it over the injured man and tucked it in, and Rollison stood up, glad to ease his knees. He took a gold case out of his pocket, lit a cigarette, and for the first time wiped his forehead, using the back of his hand. The sweat lay cold on his hand. He drew deeply on the cigarette, then looked at the nearest of three elderly men. Not far away, half a dozen others were running, and behind these Ebbutt came in an old T model Ford, the most ancient in London, and the smartest; the sun was shining brightly on its sky blue sides.

"Who saw that lunatic of a lorry driver?" Rollison asked, as if it did not occur to him that this had been done deliberately. "Anyone get the number?"

No one spoke.

"What happened?" one of the older men asked.

"Damned fool came round that corner as if he was racing at Donnington," Rollison said. He was smoking more freely, and the tension had gone from his whole body. "The motor cyclist had just passed me. He was looking over his shoulder, or wouldn't have got in

my way. I think he'll be all right," he added, "it looks that way to me." He glanced towards the Model T seeing Ebbutt's set face as he pulled into the kerb, and then climbed out clumsily. He took the situation in at a glance, and the expression that came to his eyes was one almost of wonderment. Other men from the Blue Dog, all Ebbutt's cronies, were very near. The last vestige of danger had gone, for all of these men trained in Ebbutt's gymnasium, and included some of the best boxers in London.

"You all right, Mr. Ar?" Ebbutt sounded incredulous.

"I'm fine, Bill," said Rollison, but he didn't smile. "I'm upset because I knocked this chap off his bike, nasty thing to happen. Thank God it wasn't worse." He watched other women coming with more blankets, one of them with hot water bottles, and the vixen who had called him murderer was among them, spite forgotten in the instinct to help the injured man.

Then came a police car, speeding, and soon afterwards the ringing of the ambulance bell sounded, while one woman said to another quite clearly:

"Cawse I did see it all from the winder. It wasn't Mr. Rollison's fault."

* * *

Half an hour later, only the police were left at the scene. Rollison slid into the driving seat of the Rolls-Bentley, and smiled at several youngsters who were talking about the car with baited breath. Ebbutt leaned against the door, and asked in a voice which no one outside could hear:

"Wot you going to do now, Mr. Ar?"

"Can you give me the address of Tiny Wallis and Mick Clay?"

"Well, I s'pose I could. They live in the same 'ouse. Wallis is married, Clay's a lodger." Ebbutt paused. "But I dunno whether I should tell you, Mr. Ar. Wot's on?"

"I just want to find out what makes them tick, and who they're doing their strong arm stuff for," said Rollison. "I nearly found out what happens when they tick. They laid that attack on pretty fast."

"Oh, they're quick," Ebbutt said. "Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Ar, Wallis ain't a big shot and never will be, but he's got friends and Clay will do whatever Wallis tells 'im. A lot of people wouldn't grass on them because of what might happen afterwards. The worst thing about Wallis and Clay is that they don't lay off until they've really done some damage."

"Do they always work with Teddy Boys?"

"Usually," Ebbutt conceded. "The Teddies is easy, they're always spoiling for a fight. It's an old technique, Mr. Ar, the boys wait at the corner of a street if Wallis and Clay want to do someone, and make sure they're not interrupted. Then they always have an alibi laid on."

"Any idea why they do it?"

"The gospel truth is that I dunno," confessed Ebbutt, and looked as if he meant it, for he rubbed one cauliflower ear. "I don't even know that they work for anyone in particular, they just hire themselves out."

"Do you know who they've been working for lately?"

"No, Mr. Ar, I don't. I 'eard they'd done a job for old Donny

Sampson a couple've weeks ago, but that's as far as I know."

"I knew that a barber had been attacked," Rollison said, "but I didn't think Sampson was in any racket."

"Well, Donny's made it pretty clear that he don't want no one muscling in on his business. Too rich, that's Donny's trouble, money's gone to 'is 'ead." Ebbutt ran his hand over what little hair he had, most of it bristly. "That reminds me, I ought to have a n'aircut. He's got several branches now, and there's a manager in each; most of the hair-dressing trade around here is cornered by Donny Sampson. When a barber retires or wants to sell out, Donny buys the business, and he pays a fair price, too. But he won't allow anyone else to take over any business if he can stop it. The people who've been established here for years is okay, he doesn't attempt to take away their trade, but there's no room for newcomers." Ebbutt sniffed. "Okay, provided you don't beat-up anyone to make 'em sell."

"Bill," said Rollison, very mildly, "do you think I need a hair-cut, too?"

"As a matter of fact," said Bill Ebbutt, earnestly, "I've always thought there was room for another Sweeney Todd. Why don't you go and see if Donny's trying to hemmulate Sweeney, Mr. Ar? The worst 'e can do is cut your froat."

"Which of the shops does he work at?" asked Rollison.

"Oh, the big one, proper posh place that is, up in the Whitechapel Road. You musta seen it. Ladies and gents like all of them, wigs and toupees and scalp treatment, the whole works. You really going, Mr. Ar?"

"I think so, Bill."

"Like me to come along?"

"I think I'll take a desperate chance and go alone," said Rollison dryly, and switched on the ignition. "I wouldn't like to say what Jolly will think if they make a mess of my hair."

"Don't you worry about that," said Ebbutt. "Donny's an artist all right. Well, I'll be seeing yer, Mr. Ar." He thrust out a massive hand. "Take care of yourself."

"You wouldn't forget that I asked for that address would you?" murmured Rollison.

"Well, I never! 'Ead like a sieve, that's me," said Ebbutt. "Okay, then. They live in the same 'ouse, at . . ."

Rollison grinned, made a mental note of the address, shook hands with Ebbutt, and drove off. The children waved as he passed by, and several youths at the corner near the Blue Dog looked at him sulkily but without open malice. He turned into the Mile End Road, where the world was normal. A little woman pushing a pram with fair-haired twins in it saw him and waved wildly; but for the Toff, her husband would undoubtedly have been in prison; now he was working steady at the docks.

Rollison drove to Whitechapel Road. Parking wasn't easy, but he found a spot a hundred yards or so away from Donny's big establishment. He walked slowly towards it, not worried but curious; had he been followed? As far as he could tell, he had not.

He drew nearer Donny's, his mind full of the man and what he knew of him. Donny was not a Donald or even donnish. In some way

he had acquired the first name of Adonis, perhaps from parents with a wry sense of humour, for photographs proved that Adonis Sampson must have been the ugliest and puniest child born some fifty-five years ago.

He was no longer ugly, but his looks exerted a kind of fascination. He still looked puny, although that was almost certainly deceptive.

His shop was much larger than most along here; in fact two double-fronted shops had been turned into one. The outside was painted pale blue and gold, and it would not have been out of place in New Bond Street. One section of the window was devoted to wigs and toupees and plaits of hair, much like a theatrical wigmakers; another was beautifully dressed to show cosmetics; a third would have graced a hair-dressing salon in the heart of Paris.

Rollison stepped inside.

CHAPTER SIX
Donny

Donny's was luxury.

Across the road were small, dingy houses with drab curtains and blackened chimney pots. Two doors away was a newsagent's shop with a window which hadn't been changed for years, and dust lay thick on the old dummy cigarette cartons. On the nearest corner was a fish and chip shop, with a huge sign reading: FRYING TONIGHT. To the right and the left and all about this district there was the poverty of parts of the East End, and the roughness of most of the rest. No one knew better than Rollison the quality and the oddness of many of the people, or that the squalor remained only in patches; but there was little polish on the East End of London.

Except at Donny's.

Not far away were London's docks. Along this very street came lascars and sailors from the four corners of the earth, some drunk, some perverts, some broke, some with money spilling out of their pockets. From the thousands of little houses which rose like mushrooms made of bricks, the stevedores left for their daily work, rough, hardy men whose labour made them dirty and whose wives were often hard put to keep their homes and their families clean. Their only sight of luxury was through a television set and visits to the pictures—except at Donny's.

It was like stepping out of a coaling barge into a first class liner.

Coming out of a doorway on the right was a little woman with a flushed face, her flowered cotton frock obviously Sunday best, high heeled brown shoes which needed mending, and the look of a poor man's wife. Her greying hair was a mass of lustrous curls, and a glow in her eyes told of a woman who had realised a dream. She went to a small office with two windows, like a cinema's cash desk. There a young woman with auburn hair and wearing a pale pink smock sat like a queen.

"Well, 'ow do I look, dearie?" the flushed-faced woman said.

"You look very nice indeed, Mrs. Taylor," said the queen behind the desk. "I haven't seen you looking any better."

"I will say this," said the happy-looking woman, "Donny's boys and girls know their job! Lemme see, two pun fifteen shillings, ain't it?"

"That's right, Mrs. Taylor." The queen spoke like one, too, and contrived to conceal from her customer that she was highly intrigued by the man who had just stepped inside the shop, but had not gone straight into the men's salon through a door clearly marked: *Gentlemen's Coiffeur.* This door like all the doors was painted duck egg blue and gold. The carpet was thick and yielding, and also a pale blue. Around the walls were pictures of film stars with remarkable hair styles, most of them from historical pictures.

The queen handed out five shillings change, smiled sweetly, and said:

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Taylor. You will tell your friends about our special sessions, won't you, and remind them that you save

eight shillings on a permanent wave and one and sixpence on a set if you come between ten and twelve and two-fifteen and four-thirty."

"You bet I will," said Mrs. Taylor, and bustled past Rollison.

The girl at the cash desk gave him her sweetest smile.

"Good afternoon, sir."

"Hallo," said Rollison, and beamed at her. She looked a little dazzled, as most young women would when the Toff smiled quite like that. "Is Mr. Sampson in?"

"I *think* he is engaged, sir. The manager of the gentlemen's department will be very glad to see you, though."

"I'd like to be done by Mr. Sampson in person," said Rollison, keeping a straight face. "Ask him if he can fit Mr. Rollison in?"

"Mr. Who, sir?"

"Rollison."

"R-O-Double-L," began the girl behaving as if she had never heard of Rollison, which was unusual in this part of Whitechapel and did much to suggest that she had been imported from different climes. Her voice was really pleasant, the refinement not really overdone. She lifted a telephone. "I won't keep you a moment, sir, if you will please sit down."

"Thank you," said Rollison.

He sat in a chair more comfortable than the one at his West End barber's. By his side was a small table with several magazines, including the Society glossies; every one was the current issue. By the side of these a little journal looked almost pathetically out of place, and because of that he picked it up, and read: *The Hair Stylist.* He glanced through the poor quality paper at the badly printed heads of women, and came to the back page of the cover, with the announcement of a competition. He read with interest, and into a distant corner of his mind there sank a single fact: that the only condition of entry was that you should have your hair dressed by a member of the Hair Stylists' Association. That sounded fair enough.

The girl had spoken to at least three people on the telephone, keeping her voice low so that Rollison could not hear her words, and Rollison made no attempt to get nearer. Then he saw her smile, put the receiver down, and lean forward; a pretty thing indeed.

"Mr. Sampson will see you in a very few minutes, Mr. Rollison."

"Thank you," said Rollison, very politely.

Donny was as good as his word. He appeared through one of the duck egg blue and gold painted doors, and although he was not really a stranger to Rollison he made a considerable impression. He was dressed in a white smock with a high collar, and the close fitting garment would have served a Spanish dancer, so small was Donny's waist and so elegant his carriage. Yet it was his face and head which impressed one most. He was less handsome than distinguished, his complexion was perfect, and the years had mellowed his features, so that he no longer looked austere. He had beautiful silvery hair which waved a little as it swept back from his forehead; such a man would have held Michelangelo enthralled.

He smiled, courteously.

"Mr. Rollison, this really is a pleasure. It is over a year since I saw you last." He held out his right hand.

Rollison took it.

"We mustn't let that happen again," he murmured. "I'd like to make a fortune, too."

"Sufficient for the day," said Donny, and his amber eyes turned towards Rollison so intently that it was hard to see evil here, or even associate with evil. Those eyes suggested too, that his hair had once been golden coloured; and it was still a lion's mane. "I find it hard to believe you have come simply for a haircut."

"I'd like a little chat, and know I need a trim," said Rollison. "Can you and will you?"

"For you, of course," said Donny. "This way, please." He turned and glanced out of the front door, and Rollison did also; and what Rollison saw did nothing to reassure him. He might not have been followed, but plenty of people knew where he was. Across the road were several of the youths whom he had already seen once that day. They just lounged about, obviously interested only in Donny's.

"Friends of yours?" inquired Rollison.

"Not friends, simply customers," said Donny with a deprecatory shrug and a wave of his pale hands. "It isn't always possible to pick and choose one's customers, and you will admit that the young men's hair looks well cared for."

"By Donny's?"

"I imagine so," said Donny.

He led the way past a line of six barbers, each busy on a man's hair, to a small room with only one chair. Here were all the appurtenances of a beauty parlour, and it was reserved for men. Here were the pomades and the lotions, the sprays and the powders, the special waves in the hair of unbeautiful would-be beaus. Round the walls were photographs of masculine heads of hair, all magnificently groomed.

"Please sit down," said Donny, and when Rollison obeyed, went through the customary ritual. Rollison looked at his own reflection, which was rather like a member of the Klu Klux Klan without a witch's hat. "I see that you have an excellent barber, and that your hair is naturally so good that you hardly need aids," Donny observed.

"No aids to waves," agreed Rollison, and saw the scissors glint and then snap in the man's white fingers; a surgeon's fingers. There was Donny's reflection, too. "Donny."

"Sir."

"I didn't know you were a bad man."

"Perhaps we don't mean the same thing by that expression," the hairdresser said. "I didn't know that I was, either."

"And it's unnecessary for a brilliantly successful man like you."

Donny snipped and shrugged.

"I have done well, yes, but I am not yet a millionaire, Mr. Rollison. The secret of success lies in hard work."

"And no competition."

"One buys out competition."

"Or drives it out."

"Ah," said Donny, and paused to look hard at Rollison's reflection in the mirror; it was a strange way to meet a man's eyes. a begin to understand what has brought you."

"I don't like to think of you hiring men like Tiny Wallis and Mick Clay," said Rollison chidingly. "No one deserved roughing up like that because he wanted to buy a barber's shop in your district."

Snip.

"It was," said Donny and paused and snipped; "unfortunate."

"Do you know what happened to the man?"

"I am sorry," Donny said, and kept snipping. "I was able to help him and his wife a little, and I do not think he will suffer very much."

"Why employ Wallis at all?" asked Rollison, still mildly.

"Perhaps it was a mistake," said Donny. Tut he had no instructions to use violence, only persuasion."

"Under threat of violence?"

"I don't think you always avoided violence," murmured Donny. Rollison chuckled quite spontaneously, picturing his own wall and the many trophies of violent action. "All right," he conceded. "I agree that there are times when action speaks louder than words. Why are you so anxious not to have any barber near you?"

Snip.

Pause.

"Mr. Rollison," said Donny, "I think I ought to say that I do not recognise your right to ask such questions, and that I feel under no obligation to answer." His reflection made him look rather like a saint. "However, I have no objection to making the picture clear for you. I am a family man. I have four sons and three daughters, and three of the sons and two of the daughters are married, while the others will be soon. Except for one son, all of my family is in the business. Each son and daughter and each in-law learns the trade, and then becomes a shop manager. With so many children, so many shops are needed." He stood back, comb in one hand and scissors in the other. "It is a good thing that the grandchildren are not big enough yet."

Rollison didn't answer, and made no attempt to smile. Donny looked disappointed, but went on with his work. For several minutes there was nothing but the snipping, broken occasionally by the hum of an electric clipper. Donny worked quickly and with the grace and effectiveness of a master. When he had nearly finished, he stood back.

"Mr. Rollison," he said, "you and I began life in very different ways. I was the son of poor parents, my mother was an Italian immigrant, my father spent much time in prison. When he was home, he was a barber. When I was ten, I was cutting the hair of the children of the neighbourhood, and when I was fifteen, I was in charge of the shop. I have been cutting hair in this part of London for over forty years, and I have seen my business grow and grow. It is not an exaggeration to say that it brightens the lives of many who would otherwise be drab. I turn no one away. I have special prices for those who cannot afford my normal charges. But I don't want competition in this neighbourhood, Mr. Rollison, and if I can avoid it, I shall not have any. Once an old established barber wishes to give up, I pay him well for his business, and then either take over or close his shop. Is that unreasonable?"

"Breaking into a man's home, smashing everything he possesses, kicking him so hard that he has three ribs broken and needs over twenty stitches in his head, terrifying his wife and probably scarring

her mind for life—is that reasonable, Donny?"

There was a long silence.

"Just a little more off here," said Donny, and snipped and stood back, and smiled; more like a picture-book saint than ever. "I think your regular barber will be satisfied—it is satisfying to work on a really good head of hair. I congratulate you, Mr. Rollison."

"Yes?"

"I hope we are not going to be bad friends."

"I hope not, too."

Donny shrugged and whipped off the sheet, and brushed with a soft brush, talking all the time.

"Is there anything you would like, Mr. Rollison? Haircream, tonic, razor blades, shampoo lotion, toothpaste—anything at all?" He was smiling as he opened the door of a cupboard and showed a mass of expensive-looking goods. Rollison saw that most of them were marked in a way which he knew well: a monogrammed double J, in script writing; it was the monogram of Jepsons. "Or even," went on Donny, "a wig?"

Rollison stood up.

"Not yet," he said, "but I'll know where to come if I want one, Donny."

He broke off, for he heard a door slam. That seemed almost a sacrilege here. Then came running footsteps and voices, and a girl crying on a high-pitched note. Donny stepped swiftly to the door and opened it. A girl appeared, her eyes ablaze with rage and yet despair, a girl who would have been pretty but for her expression and for the disaster which had overtaken her hair.

She had been shorn.

Someone had hacked off her hair, as if with a pair of garden shears. One cut, close to the front of her head over the right eye, actually showed the white scalp beneath; one lock fell over her left ear.

"Look what they've done to my hair!" she cried. "Look what they've done to my hair! What am I going to do? Tell me, what am I going to do? I can't stand it, I just can't stand it, *what am I going to do?"*

CHAPTER SEVEN
Boys Will Be Boys

Rollison stood and watched the older man and the girl, and in Donny's eyes he thought he saw the light of great compassion. No one could doubt the despair in the girl's, and it was not all due to shock and distress; some deeper reason lay behind it.

"Don't just stand there!" the girl cried. "What am I going to *do?"*

Donny put a pale hand gently on her shoulder.

"I will help you," he said. "Leah, who did this to you?" Each word seemed to hang heavily on the air.

"I don't know who they were. There was a gang of Teddy Boys hanging about near the shop, I didn't know they were after me. I think it's because I wouldn't have anything to do with their leader, he tried to make a date—" at this Leah broke off, and hot tears flooded her eyes. "What am I going to do?" she asked brokenly, and seemed to fall towards Donny. "I can't even enter for the competition now."

Donny's arms went round her shoulders as she cried. A saint? He looked at Rollison for the first time since the girl had come in, but he was not thinking of Rollison, only of this problem. Several assistants had come to see what was happening, two men with their hair only partly cut among them; but Donny took no more notice of these than he did of the Toff.

Rollison asked: "Where did it happen?" as if that mattered now.

"Please—" Donny began.

"It happened just round the corner," said a little woman who stood with the crowd; short, thin, with sharp features and very bright, browny eyes. "The devils! If I had my way I'd horsewhip them. There must have been a dozen of them, and when I saw them set about her out there in the open, I thought the world was coming to an end. Two of them held her arms behind her and one pushed her hair over her face and made it hang down while another one used a pair of *shears."* She gave that word a touch of horror. "I thought they were going to murder her!"

"Do the police know yet?" asked Rollison.

"There were two just round the corner, but it was done so quick no one had a chance to call them. You know what'll happen, don't you? Those devils will cover up for each other, the cops won't be able to pin a thing on to any of them."

Throughout all this, Leah went on sobbing. Now Donny turned and led her into the room where he had cut the Toff s hair. He closed the door. He did not tell the others to go back to the salons, but one after another they went, and the little woman talked angrily to the queen at the cash desk. Rollison joined them, and when he had a chance, asked quietly:

"Who is the girl, do you know?"

"Oh, yes. That's Donny's Leah."

"I don't quite understand you."

"His daughter," the little woman said tartly. "The youngest of his kids. Proper apple of his eye, Leah is."

"What was she to enter?" Rollison asked.

"Oh, the Beautiful Hair competition," answered the queen, and touched a leaflet close to her till, then picked one up and handed it to Rollison. "She had such lovely hair, Leah did, she really had a chance to win, and she'd set her heart on it." The queen looked really distressed.

Then, two policemen arrived. . . .

Rollison left them to their task, and went out to his Rolls-Bentley. No one was near it, for the crowd was gathered about the doorway of the shop, hopeful of sensation and excitement. Rollison did not get into the car at once, but walked briskly to a telephone kiosk some fifty yards away. He saw no youths, and no one appeared to take any interest in him. He dialled Whitehall 1212 and asked for Superintendent Grice; soon another man came on the line.

"I'm sorry, sir, Mr. Grice is out. Who is that, please?"

"Rollison."

"Oh, hallo, Mr. Rollison!" The voice brightened into eagerness. "I don't think Mr. Grice will be long, and I know he's hoping to hear from you. Where can he call you?"

"I'll call him again," said Rollison. "Meanwhile here's a message for him. One of Donny Sampson's daughters was attacked just now, and all her hair cut off. Ask Mr. Grice to ask the Division not to make too much fuss about it, will you?"

"Why not, sir?"

"I think it might have been done to impress me," said Rollison, "but it might be a good idea to let everyone think it was a personal quarrel between Leah Sampson and some Teddy Boys."

"I'll pass the message on, sir, but why do you think it might have been done for your benefit?"

"That's just one of the problems," said Rollison, mildly. "Goodbye." He rang off, and went out and turned towards the Rolls-Bentley. Even from here he saw that the door was open, and next moment he saw two small boys bouncing up on the seats, one at the front and one at the back. He remembered turning the key in the lock; so how had they got in?

As Rollison drew nearer, one of the boys turned and spotted him. Each was out of the car in a flash, and went racing along the road towards the nearest corner and out of sight.

"Little devils," Rollison said, but wasn't even slightly amused, for he was still sure he had locked the car. Had a car thief forced the lock?

He reached the Rolls-Bentley.

He stopped short, as if someone had hit him.

The upholstery had been ripped time and time again, with long, sharp knives. The leather was a criss cross of deep cuts, and in places the foam rubber seating showed through. The insides of the door panels had been broken, and lay on the floor, sticking in an oozy, snow-white lake; obviously a tin of paint had been turned upside down; it was impossible to put a foot on the floor near the steering wheel without stepping on to the tacky mess.

Rollison stared towards the street corner.

He would not be able to recognise those boys again, and doubted whether anyone else would. They had been paid for this, of course,

and given the tools and the paint. This was of a piece with the raid on Jimmy Jones's home and the destruction done at the other places: this had the mark of beasts upon it, the mark of Tiny Wallis and Mick Clay.

He closed the car doors quietly, went back to the telephone, called Jolly, and told him all about it.

"I'm very sorry indeed to hear of this vandalism, sir," Jolly said. "I will arrange for a garage to come and tow the car away. You may lock it up again, sir, I will give the men the spare key, and I'll send a hired car for you."

"Thanks," said Rollison. "An oldish one with a hotted up engine, and send one of my toy pistols with the driver."

"Very good, sir." Jolly was not at all surprised. "Is there anything else?"

"Please," said Rollison. "Don't ask the Yard or anyone official, but get in touch with one of the newspapers. Wilson of the *Globe* is probably the best for this. We want to know if there have been many cases of hair fetishism in the past few weeks."

"Young woman whose hair has been cut off, sir?"

"Yes."

"I read of such a case only yesterday, I believe that it was at Croydon," said Jolly. "And I think—but I will check, and have a report ready as soon as possible."

"Good. And check the value of human hair for wigs and things, will you?"

"I will indeed. What time do you think you will be back, sir?"

"With luck, for dinner."

"Very good, sir," said Jolly. "I shall expect you."

When Rollison stepped out of the kiosk the crowd round the shop had thinned. He saw a Jaguar moving off, and making a U turn. Donny was at the wheel, still wearing his white smock, with his young daughter beside him. Leah Sampson, aged about eighteen, with her lovely, glossy, raven black hair shorn off.

Had that been done to coincide with his, Rollison's, visit to Donny?

If so, why?

It would be easy to imagine a reason for sheer coincidence.

Rollison passed the Rolls-Bentley again; no one was near it. Inside and outside the hairdressers' things seemed quite normal, and he was sure that he wasn't being followed. He recalled the address of Tiny Wallis and Mick Clay, which was quite near here.

He waited at a corner for fifteen minutes, and then the car which Jolly had laid on drew up, and a driver from the garage jumped out. "This the job you want sir?"

The job was a five years old Austin.

"Acceleration all right?" asked Rollison. "Like a jet, sir. Care to try it out?"

"I'll take your word for it, thanks," said Rollison. "You'll wait for the breakdown van for my car, won't you?"

"Yes, sir. Oh, and here's something Mr. Jolly asked me to give you."

"Fine," said Rollison gravely, and took a small cardboard box

from the man: the “toy’ pistol.

He got into the car, turned the corner at once, and then tried out the car’s acceleration; it was all that he could ask if he should need to get away in a hurry. He drove at normal speed towards the Mile End Road, and eventually to the street where the Blue Dog stood at the corner. He was not surprised to see two of Ebbutt’s scouts standing at the door of the big gymnasium behind the pub, a wooden building with a corrugated iron roof.

The men waved, and one came hurrying. Rollison slowed down.

“Mr. Ebbutt would like a word wiv you, Mr. Ar.”

“Thanks,” said Rollison, and got out and lit another cigarette. It was a little after half past three; less than two and a half hours since he had first stepped into the Blue Dog. One of the astonishing things was the speed of events. The attempt to run him down; the swift decision to act upon a woman’s charge of murder; the shearing of Leah Sampson’s hair; and the despoliation of the Rolls-Bentley. All of these things helped to create in him a cold anger which he could not throw off; so his greeting for Bill Ebbutt was not so bright as it might have been.

“Want me, Bill?”

“Yes, Mr. Ar,” said Ebbutt, panting a little because he had been hurrying. He looked almost an old man. “You’ve been warned plenty “aven’t you? They nearly tore your guts out down at the corner.”

“But they didn’t touch me, Bill.”

Ebbutt was as earnest as a man could be, and his big, ugly face was a study in solemnity.

“You got away with that, Mr. Ar, but take it from me you won’t get away with any more unless you take a bodyguard with you.”

“Thanks, Bill.”

“Oo’jer want?”

“Not yet,” said Rollison, with a grin which wasn’t quite spontaneous. “If I go around with two of your chaps on my tail, Wallis and Clay will have scored a moral victory. I’d like to borrow a cosh if you’ve any left among the relics.” Now the spontaneity was back. “We don’t want them to have any moral victories, do we? I’ll tell you if I reach the point where I’ll feel safer with two of your muscle-men behind me. How about that cosh?”

“I’ll get it,” promised Ebbutt, and was gone only a few minutes. When he came back, he handed Rollison a shiny black cosh, pliable and soft, and weighted with lead shot. “If I was goin’ to Wallis’s place, I’d take a knuckle-duster, you’ll never make an impression on ‘im or Clay’s thick skulls wiv a cosh. Mr. Ar, be sensible, and change your mind,” he pleaded. “This job ain’t worth getting yourself in ‘ospital for.”

“I’m not a bit sure that you’re right,” said Rollison, and gripped the man’s thick forearm. “Bill, it isn’t so long since you and your chaps ran into a lot of trouble in a job like this. I’m going to try to keep them out of this one if I can.”

“Well, I ought to know better than try to make you change your mind,” Ebbutt conceded unwillingly, “but we’d rally round, Mr. Ar. And you can’t say I didn’t warn you.”

His face was set and bleak as he watched Rollison drive off.

One of the scouts came up, and asked:

"Where'd you fink 'e's orf to?"

"It's anybody's guess," said Ebbutt, "but from the look in 'is eyes 'e's aht for trouble. Wouldn't surprise me to learn 'e's gone to see Wallis and Clay."

The scout almost winced.

"He wouldn't be so crazy!"

"You don't know Mr. Richard Rollison," said Ebbutt, and a glimmer of a smile came into his eyes. "You don't know Mr. Ruddy Torf, you don't. That man would take on the whole Russian Army if he thought it worth a try.

CHAPTER EIGHT
Bad Man's Wife

Dirk Street was near the docks.

It was one of a few short streets in the district. The terraced houses on either side had been built some fifty or sixty years ago for the foremen, office managers and all the better paid workers of dockland; a kind of upper stratum of nineteenth-century slumland. It was still an upper stratum. Only a man who was doing very well indeed was likely to live in Dirk Street, where the rents were comparatively high and the cost of buying a house almost prohibitive.

Tiny Wallis and Micky Clay lived at Number 11, the middle house of the terrace on the right hand side as Rollison drove in. The cranes and the masts of ships showed above the warehouse walls and the dock walls, not two hundred yards away. All the noises of the docks came into this street, sounding loud when Rollison switched off the engine. He stopped outside Number 19, and surveyed the scene, oblivious of the rattle of cranes and winches, the puff-puff-puff of engines, the shouting of men, the squealing of pulleys, the dismal sound of a ship's siren. No one else was in the street, but outside Number 11 was a flashy-looking sports car; and it was fairly new.

Most of the houses had been recently painted, the curtains at all the windows were clean; this was 'class' all right.

Rollison got out.

He was aware of the people at the windows, faces hidden by the curtains, hands in sight where they pulled the curtains back. This was a neighbourhood where people did not watch their neighbours out of simple curiosity, but because they wanted to keep a step ahead of danger; and two steps ahead of the police. Two of London's most prosperous fences lived in Dirk Street; so did one of London's most nimble burglars.

So residents watched, forever wary.

Rollison walked briskly towards Number 11. Four stone steps led from the pavement to the front door, and that in itself put the houses here in a higher social level than the hovels where the front door opened on to the narrow pavement. He knew that he was watched from this house, too, but simply rang the bell.

No one answered at first.

He turned so that he could see the street. Opposite Number 11 a woman had given up all pretence, and was staring at him openly. Two men appeared on the other side of the road, obviously spying.

Rollison gave the bell a longer ring.

This time there were footsteps, quick and light; a woman's. She came straight to the door, but there was a long moment of hesitation before she opened it. When she did her foot was against it, so that the caller could not thrust it wide open easily. A woman looked at Rollison. She was in her early thirties, well made-up, wearing a black skirt and a beautifully ironed white silk blouse.

"Good afternoon." She was suspicious.

"Good afternoon," said Rollison politely. "Is Mr. Wallis in?"

She said "No," flatly, and he wasn't sure whether to believe her or

not. The way she formed the word suggested that she was going to say "no' to whatever he asked. She was a good-looking woman, and that silk blouse was well-filled.

"Mr. Clay?"

"No, they're both out."

"Do you mind if I wait?" asked Rollison, and put his foot forward so that she couldn't close the door, dropped his right hand to her wrist, and thrust her back. His broad shoulders hid all this from view of the person across the road. The woman opened her mouth to protest, but before she could he was inside the house, and the door was closing behind him.

He let her go.

"You . . . !" she spat at him, and struck him sharply across the face.

"That's the first and the last," said Rollison, coldly. "Which one of them owns you?"

"If you don't get out of here I'll . . ."

"Bring the teddy bears to frighten me," suggested Rollison, and before she could draw back, took her wrist again and twisted enough to show her that he had complete control of the situation. "You won't get hurt if you stop struggling and start being civil," he said. "Quite sure they're out?"

She didn't answer.

He believed that the men were out of the house, for there was no movement to suggest that anyone else was here. The passage was high and airy, and doors from the bright-looking rooms opened onto it. The stairs were carpeted, and the passage alongside the stairs and leading to the kitchen and other back rooms was also carpeted. The walls had been papered and the woodwork painted recently; here was all the evidence of prosperity.

"When Tiny gets back he'll tear you to bits," the woman threatened, but she was scared.

"I'll take a chance," said Rollison. He let her go again, and smiled as if they were friends of a lifetime. "I want to have a little chat with Tiny and Mick. Is there a better place than this?"

She kicked him on the shin.

It hurt.

He grabbed her again and held her very tightly, as if ready to squeeze the life out of her. She was more than scared, she was terrified. Abruptly he let her go. She backed away, breathing heavily and watching him nervously.

He gave her a dazzling smile.

His voice was quite unflurried when he said:

"Now let's be friendly, shall we? I'm going to wait for Tiny, and you can't exactly throw me out. I could even tell Tiny that I'd come to see you by appointment."

Fear stormed in her eyes.

"You mustn't do that!"

"Jealous, is he?" Rollison murmured. "Which in particular?"

"I'm—I'm Mrs. Wallis."

"How do you do, Mrs. Wallis," said Rollison politely. "When is Mr. Wallis likely to be in?"

"He might come in any time, and if he finds you here—" she broke off, still breathing hard, still frightened; but there was a changing look in her eyes. Rollison had often seen a look like it in a woman who had started off by wanting to cut his throat. She was just beginning to forget that he was Richard Rollison, the Toff, and beginning to realise that he was breathtakingly handsome, and had a way with him. "He'll kill you," she finished abruptly.

"And that wouldn't do," murmured Rollison, and offered her a cigarette. "Sure you don't know what time he'll be in?"

She answered almost at once.

"It won't be later than seven, he always likes the news on the telly."

"What about Clay?"

"He won't be back till late," she said. "He's gone down to Guildford to see a pal."

"I'll find out who he's beaten up in the morning," said Rollison dryly. "So Tiny's the only one to worry about for a while. Anyone else home?"

She shook her head.

"Clay not married?"

"No."

"Just a friend?"

"He's my brother."

"Oh, is he?" said Rollison, more heavily, although he was still smiling. "You really had bad luck. With a brother like that you had to marry a man as bad if not worse. Why do you stand for it?"

She made no attempt to answer.

"Don't try to tell me you like it," said Rollison, and took a large envelope from his pocket and opened the flap. "Some women might but I don't think you're one of them. Seen these?" He handed her three police photographs of Jimmy Jones, when he had first been seen by the police and before the ambulance had taken him away. "Nice way for your husband to earn a living."

"It's none of my business!"

"It's all your business," Rollison said softly, "and if you go on shutting your eyes to it, one of these days you'll find yourself in trouble, because someone will get their own back, and they won't stop at Tiny. What's your name?"

She was surprised into answering:

"Stella."

"Stella," echoed Rollison, "I've stopped reading the Riot Act, and I'm going to have a look round. You can come with me, or I can lock you in a cupboard or tie you up. Take your choice."

Anger flared in her eyes.

"If you touch anything here, you'll be crazy! I tell you you don't know Tiny, he's strong enough to break you into little pieces."

Rollison chuckled.

"I can believe it, but I don't think he will. Tiny is on the way out, Stella, although he probably doesn't realise it yet. What's it going to be?"

He didn't try to rush her. There was plenty of time; even if Wallis came home unexpectedly early, there was time enough.

"You'd better lock me up," she said at last. "All right, wise Stella," said Rollison, and grinned. "Which cupboard would you like?" She was bewildered; then unexpectedly she laughed.

"I've often heard about you," she said. "I'm beginning to understand what people mean. The larder's the best place, there's a ventilator, and it's quite big." She turned towards the kitchen, then stopped abruptly, so that he banged against her. She twisted round, taking his hand, and pressed against him. "Listen to me," she said urgently. "You're asking for the worst trouble you've ever had. You don't know how strong Tiny is. When he knows you've put a hand on me, he'll go raving mad. He's so jealous he's crazy."

"Then we mustn't let him know what we've been to each other," murmured Rollison. "How long have you been married to him?"

"Fifteen years."

"Enjoyed it?"

She said sharply: "I can't just think about myself, I've got the kids to think about."

"Kids?"

"We're human, aren't we?" Stella Wallis flashed. "We go to bed like anybody else."

"Boys or girls?"

"One of each."

"Where are they now?"

"At school," she said, "they'll be late home tonight, they're going to sports practice. They're my first responsibility." She led the way across a kitchen which was as spick and span as the kitchen at Gresham Terrace. There was a large refrigerator, the motor humming softly, a stainless steel sink unit, everything a modern kitchen could have. "Besides," she added, "he's not mean."

She opened the door of the larder herself. Rollison looked round in the kitchen and found several yale keys in a drawer. The back door had a yale lock. He tried three keys, found two which fitted, and slipped one into his pocket. Then he went into the front room. He wasn't surprised to find a kind of Victorian parlour, a faint smell of furniture polish, a mahogany sideboard, and several sepia portraits on the wall. He drew a blank there, and tried a small room next to it. Here was a kind of living room, with a television in one corner, comfortable armchairs, one wall fitted with shelves and loaded with books, mostly war stories, records of the ring, and tales of adventure—and with them a few romances by well-known authors. Dream world for two. Tiny Wallis could escape into a world of vicarious excitements and tales of epic courage and great physical strength and endurance; his wife, into the romance which might have been. In a corner opposite the television was a writing bureau. Rollison found it locked, and took a pen knife out of his pocket; it had one blade of which the police strongly disapproved, for it was a skeleton key. In less than a minute he forced the lock of the writing bureau, and pulled down the top, ready for writing. Inside were opened letters, notepaper, envelopes, everything one would expect to find in neat array.

There was also a cash box, which was locked.

There were a few newspaper cuttings.

And there was a little pile of leaflets like those which had been at Donny's cashier's cubicle, announcing the Most Beautiful Hair Competition.

"Well, well," murmured Rollison, and stared at these for several seconds, then put one more into his pocket, left the others, and completed his search. He found nothing else here except a kind of day book—a large diary with a page for every day. He glanced through this, and his interest quickened, for in it were the names and addresses of people who had been visited by Wallis and Clay.

There was a note dated a week ago, reading: *Villiers Street, J. Jones.*

Villiers Street?

There was no more recent entry, and Rollison closed the book, glanced through the letters which told him nothing new, then went to the front door and listened. A motor-cycle was outside, its engine beating as if in great haste, but it moved off and the sound gradually faded. Someone walked past, and children were laughing; of course, the youngsters were out of school by now.

Had Stella Wallis told the truth about her two?

Rollison went upstairs.

He found a wall safe hidden behind a picture over the big bed in a double room which faced the street. He made no attempt to force this, but glanced out of the window. A little knot of people was standing and talking and looking this way. That prodded him into searching the room quickly. He found nothing else to help him, but when he opened a long wardrobe which occupied the whole of one wall, he saw a short mink coat, a thousand pounds worth of fur even on a thieves' market.

Wallis certainly wasn't mean with money; and obviously he had plenty.

There were two nicely-furnished smaller rooms, obviously the children's, and a third bedroom: Mick Clay's. Here the furniture was as good as that in any of the rooms. The decoration was too: but Rollison could not fail to see the difference here compared with the rest of the house. Clay was untidy, he left his clothes in a heap, there were the marks of cigarette burns on the mantelpiece and on two chairs. There was an impression that Mrs. Wallis had given up trying in here; had just closed the door and left her brother to get on with it.

Rollison went downstairs again.

He listened at the front and back door, but heard nothing. It wasn't yet five o'clock. He went into the living-room, and picked up a large book which he'd seen before, but hadn't looked at. He wasn't surprised when he saw that it was a press-cuttings book, and that here was a record of the newspaper reports of police court inquiries and accounts of people who had suffered like poor Jimmy Jones.

Then Rollison heard a sound along the passage; a moment later, the front door opened.

He stepped swiftly to the passage door as the shadow of a big man appeared.

The front door closed.

CHAPTER NINE
Bad Man

The closing of the front door was very soft. Rollison felt quite sure that this was Wallis, and that he had been told who was here. The first footsteps were very soft and light, too; furtive and stealthy. Rollison stood close to the wall.

Wallis came in sight.

He was tougher-looking than Rollison remembered; not huge, but massive with a short neck on his broad, thick shoulders. He wasn't bad-looking, especially side face, but Rollison could see that his nose had been broken years ago. He was staring straight ahead, towards the kitchen door, but would soon look in here.

His right hand was held a little in front of him, and on it the brass of a knuckle duster gleamed dully.

Rollison felt his heart begin to thump.

Wallis took another step forward, and it looked almost as if he was going straight past; hut he didn't. He spun round towards the living-room door, very quickly for a big man, his right hand raised ready to strike. It was easy believe that one blow from that armoured list would fell the strongest man alive.

Rollison stood quite still.

Wallis said, in a rough but high-pitched voice: "So you're still here."

He certainly wasn't ugly, but there was an animal look about him, a kind of rawness suggesting that he lived by the law of the jungle. It was easy to picture this man as ruthless, heartless, savage; easy to believe that lie could wreck a home built up over half a century with a calculated thoroughness which was entirely free from passion.

He showed his very strong, white teeth in a smile which was also a leer.

"Now I'm going to smash you to pulp," he said, and showed his other hand; in this he held a shiny black leather cosh, a twin to Rollison's. I'm going to smash you up so that—"

"Tiny," Rollison interrupted, "Stella's a nice girl."

Wallis stopped in the doorway, eyes narrowing. He had a puzzled look; it would be easy to believe he was very slow thinking.

Was he?

"You leave Stella out of this," he said. "Where is she?"

"I sent her out on a little errand."

"I know that's a lie. Stella wouldn't do what you told her."

"She had no choice."

Wallis said in his slow way: "You're lying. I'll look after Stella afterwards." He raised the cosh. Any moment now he would smash it at Rollison, and if he landed the first blow, that would be the end of this day's work.

Rollison said: "If you touch me, you can say good-bye to your wife."

The narrowed eyes were angry now, but they were still puzzled, and the blow didn't fall. Wallis stood there for at least half a minute, only an inch or two taller than Rollison and only an inch or two

broader, with his jaw thrust forward and his mouth set tightly, and the questions in his eyes making a kind of torment.

"You're crazy," he said.

Rollison said: "When I'm fighting a wild animal, I fight like a wild animal. I've put your wife in a place where no one will find her unless I do. Keep back."

"Why, if you don't tell me where—" Wallis began, and did the obvious thing: he smashed with cosh and knuckle duster at Rollison, flinging his whole weight into the blows, sure that he could break resistance and spirit, and compel his victim to tell him where to find his wife. He attacked without any thought of defence, and left himself wide open. Rollison whipped the cosh out of his pocket and struck him across the side of the head.

Wallis gasped, and fell back, as if he had not dreamed there would be danger.

Rollison snatched at his right wrist, gripped, twisted, and almost casually sent Wallis thudding back against the passage wall. Before he had reeled away, Rollison was after him, first snatching Wallis's cosh away, then holding his right wrist and pulling the knuckle duster off with the other hand. He got it free. It fell to the carpet with a dull sound, and Rollison bent down, picked it up, and backed away.

He tossed the knuckle-duster into one of the easy chairs, and slid the coshes into his own pocket. Then he took out the packet which the Austin driver had given him, opened it, and with all the casualness in the world, revealed a small automatic.

"I wasn't worried by you on your own," he said off-handedly, "but I thought I'd better be prepared to welcome your friends. How many are outside?"

Wallis looked sick and hurt and dazed. He was standing upright, but his head was bowed, and his arms hung rather loosely by his side. There was no mark on him, but it was a long time since he had been hurt at all. His fair hair, which looked as if it had been marcel-waved at Donny's, was too immaculate to be true. He kept blinking, and Rollison doubted whether he heard the question. Rollison moved forward and asked more sharply:

"How many men outside?"

Wallis licked his lips.

"There—there's no one."

"Don't give me that."

"No one outside," mumbled Wallis. "Thought I could handle you myself." He saw the gun. He looked down at his bare right hand, and shrugged, but there was a glint of intelligence in his eyes now. Was he as dull-witted as he appeared to be? Or still suffering from shock? "One day I will," he added, as if in afterthought.

"I don't believe you'd come here and tackle me by yourself," Rollison said. "How many men outside?"

"Why don't you go and look?" Wallis said that as if it was a brilliant sally.

"All right," Rollison said. "If you're lying don't blame me if you get killed. The police wouldn't worry if they found your body, I'd probably get a medal for doing it."

Wallis stared with that dull, puzzled look, as if he didn't really

understand what this was all about.

"Where's Stella?" he mumbled. "Don't hurt Stella."

"She'll be all right if you do what you're told," Rollison said sharply. "Who paid you for the Middleton Street job?"

Wallis echoed: "The Middleton Street job?" as if he hadn't heard aright.

"That's what I said."

Wallis closed his eyes, then cautiously put a hand to his pocket and drew out a handkerchief; it hadn't been unfolded, and was snow white and perfectly ironed. He dabbed at his lips.

"No one paid me," he announced at last. "Try telling the truth."

"No one paid me," repeated Wallis, and something like a grin twisted his lips. "I did it for love." He moved so that he could sit down on the arm of a chair, and it would not have surprised Rollison if he had made a dart for the gun. "If you think you can make me talk, you're crazy."

"Forgotten your wife?"

"No," said Wallis, more deliberately, "I haven't forgotten Stella, but I know all about you. You wouldn't do anything to a woman." There was a bravado in his manner now. "You're too much of a gentleman, that's what you are. Forget it, Rollison, you won't get a squeak out of me."

"Won't I?" said Rollison, softly.

Not now, or for the next hundred years," Wallis said. "You might as well save your breath."

He meant it.

He was not only massive, immensely strong and utterly ruthless, but in his way he was brave; it might be the bravery of a stupid man, but it was still bravery. He wasn't at all what Rollison had expected to find. Certainly it

It would be useless to threaten him, as useless to use force even if he could bring himself to use it against a man who hadn't a chance. You could hate: you could want to see such a man punished beyond physical endurance for the things he had done; but it was a different matter if you were appointed the avenger. Wallis knew that. Wallis did not think that he was in any immediate physical danger, and he was not really frightened for his wife.

If he had reasons to believe that he was wrong he might sing a different song.

"Tiny," said Rollison, nursing the gun and leaning forward to emphasise his words, "I've told you what I want. If you don't come across, you'll have some shocks. Who paid you for the Middleton Street job?"

Wallis sneered.

"Who was it? Donny Sampson?"

Wallis's lips were still twisted. "You won't do a thing," he seemed to say, "you can't scare me."

"One more chance and that's the end of my patience," said Rollison, and there was menace in his voice, an expression on his face which had scared many a man who had seemed as tough as this one; but he got no reward at all. "All right," he said, and levelled the gun

straight at Wallis's face. "This is one of your mistakes. You won't look nice when they find you." He waited for a few seconds, saw Wallis's hands tighten, saw him clutch the arms of his chair, saw the dawn of fear. Wallis actually held his breath, but he didn't speak: and silently he seemed to say, "I'll call your bluff. Rollison squeezed the trigger.

In that last moment Wallis saw the movement and jumped up wildly, as if he realised that he had been wrong, and great fear blazed up in him. But he was too late.

His eyes showed that fear, and then a kind of fury; next moment the cloud of vapour from the muzzle of the automatic hid his features. He began to gasp and mutter incoherently. His hands went to his eyes which burned and streamed with water. And while the tear gas from the gas pistol stung him, Rollison took out a cosh, and struck on the nape of the bull neck.

The one blow knocked him out.

Rollison said: "We'll see how you like it," and looked round the pleasant room, the television set, the books, all the loved things in this home. He thought of old Mrs. Blake of Middleton Street and what she had lost, and of the others who had suffered just as badly. The temptation to deal with this man as he had dealt with so many was almost overwhelming, but Rollison fought it back, and left the room.

He reached the kitchen and opened the larder door.

Stella Wallis looked up at him, as if she was frightened of what she might see. Obviously she had expected her husband.

"Isn't *he—home?"*

"He's home and sleeping it off," said Rollison, "and he won't love me much when he comes round."

She looked utterly astounded.

"You mean that you—" she broke off. "You can't make me believe you got the best of Tiny!"

"I got the best of Tiny this time and it wasn't even difficult," said Rollison. "Now you're going to help me do it again. You're coming with me, Stella, for a little holiday. Tiny will wonder where you are. I'm quite touched by his obvious devotion. You'd better wear a hat and coat, and bring anything else you want."

Her face was a study in disbelief and bewilderment.

"You don't seriously mean it."

"Let's hurry, shall we?" said Rollison, and took her wrist and drew her out of the larder. "There's a lot to do." He hustled her up to her bedroom, and she took a coat, a hat and a scarf and some gloves from the wardrobe and a dressing chest; then she picked up a handbag, and turned and looked at him as if she still didn't really believe that this was happening.

"After this, he'll kill you."

"I'll worry about me. Come on!"

"What about my children?" her voice rose up. "Your neighbours will look after your children," Rollison said, "they're not in any trouble. Let Tiny work it out for himself." He t ook her arm again. "Now let's hurry."

At the foot of the stairs he pushed open the door of the living-room. Wallis was sprawled back in the armchair, and his eyes flickered, as if f he was on the point of coming round.

Stella said in a strangled voice: “No,” and looked at Rollison. It was a look he would remember for a long time, because she couldn’t keep the admiration out of her eyes, and in that moment she was quite startlingly handsome.

“Be seeing you, Tiny,” Rollison said, and hurried to the front door. “After you.” He let the woman go first, for he was still uncertain about what he would find here. All he found were neighbours, gaping; no youths, no strong-arm men, nothing to suggest that Wallis had lied. The hired car was still along the road.

CHAPTER TEN
Pieces Of A Puzzle

No one followed Rollison or Stella Wallis.

She sat by his side, subdued and bewildered, and made no attempt to get away, even when they were stopped at traffic lights in the city and the West End, where the evening rush hour was just past its peak. She was still looking as if she could not believe what had happened when Rollison drew up outside Number 22 Gresham Terrace. He glanced up and down, to make sure that he had not been followed, then led Stella to the stairs, and walked up behind her. She had beautiful, quite exceptional legs, and walked very well. At the top landing and outside the flat marked G, she turned and said in a low-pitched voice:

"He'll kill you. I mean it."

"I have a friend waiting with my obituary notice," said Rollison solemnly. "It's been on ice for seventeen years." He opened the front door with the key but didn't go in at once. There was always the possibility that the flat would have been visited by—for instance—Mick Clay.

Jolly appeared.

"Good evening, sir." He bowed to Stella Wallis, as he would to royalty. "Good evening, madam."

Rollison said brightly: "Evening, Jolly. This is Mrs. Tiny Wallis." Jolly did no more than tighten his lips; the casual observer would not have noticed the slightest indication of surprise. "She wants to hide away from an irate husband for a few days. Where do you suggest?" Rollison asked this blandly as he led the way across a small but pleasant lounge-hall and into the big room, while Stella stared at him as if at a madman. "Any notions?"

"I don't—" Stella began, but broke off.

"I would suggest Mr. Micklem's place, sir,"

Jolly said promptly.

"Good idea," approved Rollison, thoughtfully. "Near enough to London for you to take Mrs. Wallis there this evening and get back in time to put me to bed, but far enough to be out of immediate danger. Telephone for a car to be at the back in ten minutes, will you?"

"Very good, sir."

"B—b—but—" began Stella weakly, and then gave it up.

"What you want is a little pick-me-up," said Rollison hospitably. "What's it to be?" He led the way to a cocktail cabinet, and when Stella said: "Gin and tonic, I think," in a faint voice, he poured out for her, poured a whisky and soda for himself, and said: "To a happy holiday."

Words burst out of her.

"It's crazy, you can't do this to me, you just can't do it!"

Did you ever see such a piece of sheer exhibitionism as that?" inquired Rollison, and indicated the trophy wall, with all its souvenirs of past crimes, past dangers and past triumphs. "Ignore the rope, that only hanged a man. See that cosh? A toughie who thought he was as good as Tiny used that, and he took the long drop too. That knuckle

duster was also intended to break every bone in my body. Not quite large enough for Tiny, would you say?"

"I'm beginning to think you might get away with it," Stella said chokily, "but don't make any mistake, if Tiny ever gets you in his hands he'll never let you go again."

"I think you're probably right," agreed Rollison soberly. "I'll have to keep away." He glanced at Jolly, who came into the room again. "All fixed, Jolly?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any special news for me?"

Jolly paused to glance at Stella Wallis, as if wondering whether what news he had could safely be told in her presence; and then decided that it could. His report was a masterly piece of precision and abbreviation. James Matthison Jones was fully conscious again, and showing signs of full recovery; Ada Jepson had telephoned, but left no message; Wilson of the *Globe* had told him of a dozen London cases of girls having long hair shorn, and believed that many other cases had been reported in the past few months.

"Human hair is moderately valuable, sir."

"What do you call moderately?"

"About nine or ten pounds a head if average dark hair, that is the present market price on imported hair from India and Pakistan. Some still comes from central Europe, sir. Fair hair will fetch from twenty to thirty per cent more. White or ash-blonde hair, especially if wavy, may fetch as much as twenty guineas a head."

"At ten or fifteen pounds a time it wouldn't make a fortune for anyone," Rollison said. "Would it, Stella?"

She had been watching Jolly as if fascinated, but answered at once.

"It might for a barber," she said. "Like to know where the best wigs come from around here?"

"You're going to say Donny Sampson's."

"It must be wonderful to have second sight," Stella Wallis gibed. "Donny's own daughter had her hair cut off today."

"Really."

"And Donny's a cunning old so-and-so," the woman went on. "He gets the names and addresses of girls with lovely hair from his competition, and sooner or later they lose their hair—if it's the best for making wigs. He owns dozens of barber's shops in London, and this Hair Stylists' Association is just a name for them, although he keeps in the background. He has those leaflets distributed and advertises where it'll do most good, in local newspapers and shop windows, and gets more silly little fools to go to his places. He must have pulled in thousands of customers! They can only enter if they go to a shop he owns, whether his name's on the front or not. He gets hundreds of heads of hair for his wigs that way."

"Very interesting," said Rollison gratefully. "We'll have to check on Donny. Thanks, Stella. Another gin? Right then, off you go! Don't try any tricks now. Jolly, if Mrs. Wallis should fall asleep in the car, don't be too surprised," he added quite unexpectedly. "She's had a strenuous day."

"Sleep? I never get tired until after midnight, you're

talking through your—" began Stella Wallis, and then her eyes rounded, she broke off, and her hands raised to her breast. "What was in that drink? Come on, tell me, you beast, what was in it?"

"Good night," said Rollison, sweetly. "You'll be all right, as far as I know no one has any quarrel with you."

She looked as if she could have struck him, but did not try, just followed Jolly out of the room, through the kitchen and down the fire escape to the car which was waiting in a street near Gresham Terrace. As she went, Rollison stood by the window of his large room, with the trophies behind him and the wide street below.

It was probably five minutes after Jolly and the woman had gone that a youth appeared, strolling casually along the street; soon there were three.

"Casing the joint," Rollison murmured. He grinned, stepped to the telephone, and dialled Scotland Yard. This time Grice was in.

"Bill," said Rollison quickly, "Jolly's out, and I'm going out in fifteen minutes. Soon after that I think some gentlemen of the Edwardian period will pay me a visit. I'd hate to have my flat wrecked. If you happened to have a squad car or a Q car nearby—"

Grice was sharp. "Sure about this?"

"Yes."

"I'll fix it."

"Don't jump down my throat if I ask your chaps to make sure these Teddies have time to break in, will you? The redder the hand the tighter the handcuff, if you know what I mean."

"They won't act too soon," Grice said gruffly. "What's this about you knocking a motor¬cyclist off his machine in Rockham Street?"

"I did. A lorry chased me. The motor-cyclist was a decoy. How is he?"

"Dead," said Grice.

"Oh," said Rollison, very quietly. "Bill, I'm sorry. But it gives you a chance to probe deep. He was one of Tiny Wallis's men. I don't know much about Wallis, but in a funny way he's good. Either he's one of the ablest crooks I've ever come across, with brilliant staff work, or he's got a clever man behind him."

"What's this story that you've kidnapped his wife?" Grice interrupted.

Rollison came nearer to making an admission of a felony than he had ever done in his life: Grice had never caught him so deftly on the wrong leg. He took a few seconds to answer, and Grice went on gruffly:

"Let's have the truth."

"Don't tell me that Tiny's lodged a complaint with the police," said Rollison, and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand.

"A complaint was lodged."

"Well, well," said Rollison meekly, "I didn't think he would have it in him. She came of her own free will, Bill." When Grice didn't answer, he went on: "And I think I can produce satisfactory evidence of that."

"Jolly, I suppose."

"Jolly."

"Rolly," said Grice, suddenly very earnest, "I know that I

practically asked you to see what you could find out about Wallis and Clay, but I didn't expect you to go racing about the East End like a maniac, and as for making Wallis's wife go off with you—it's absolutely crazy. Apart from the possibility of a charge of abduction, you're asking for serious trouble. After this, Wallis will be—"

"Cross, I suppose," interpolated Rollison mildly. "On the abduction matter Bill, see my solicitor." He drew his hand across his forehead again. Did you find out anything about the hooligans who cut off Leah Sampson's hair?"

"Not a thing," said Grice. "The Division handled it, we kept out as you seemed so anxious that we should. Everyone named has an alibi."

"I'm told there's a plague of hair-shearing in London," Rollison observed.

"There's a lot more than usual, but we always have some," Grice said. "Why were you anxious we shouldn't make too much fuss over Leah's?"

"The coincidence was remarkable. I called on Donny, and while I was there young Leah came rushing in, so shorn that she'll have to wear a wig for several weeks. I wondered if it was to show me how little Wallis cares."

"Could be," conceded Grice, very slowly. "How well do you know Donny?"

"I'm not sure."

"Did you know that he's become one of the biggest land-owners in his part of London?" Rollison said blankly: "Fact?"

"Positive fact. He began by buying up the small shops he had rented for years, then buying up other shops—all barbers'—and in the past year or two he's bought up shops of all kinds. He's a really big land-owner."

"Kindly landlord?" inquired Rollison, as if hopefully.

"We've never heard anything different,"

Grice said, "but it's a trend I don't much like."

"How'd he get the money to go into the estate business?"

"He did it by extending his shops, setting the expenses against taxation, and keeping strictly within the law," Grice answered. "No doubt about that. He works mostly with his own family, although he has a fairly big staff outside the family."

"The hairdressers' millionaire."

"Wealthy, anyhow," Grice conceded. "What made you go to see him?"

"I was told that he'd put Wallis and Clay on to a job."

Did you tell him that to his face?"

"Yes, and he didn't deny it." Rollison waited, but Grice had nothing to say, so Rollison went on: "You'll lay that car on, won't you?"

"I just scribbled a note and the order's gone out on the other telephone," Grice said. "And listen—if Wallis presses his charge, we can't stall him. At the moment I'm told that he looks as if a steam-hammer hit him."

"Oh, no," said Rollison, "just a little fist or two. Thanks, Bill."

He rang off.

He lit a cigarette and poured himself another drink, then glanced

out of the window and saw that several of the youths were there now; he had never seen so many people lounging about Gresham Terrace. Possibly they were there to try to make sure that Wallis's wife was not taken away; as likely that they were coming to get her, and were waiting for a signal. Rollison let thoughts trickle through his mind. Perhaps the most puzzling one was Wallis's action; for Wallis to complain to the police was remarkable, unless—

He'd been ordered to complain.

Who paid Wallis? Who was his "brain"?

"When we know that we'll know most of the rest," said Rollison to himself, then finished his drink and went into the kitchen. Jolly had prepared everything for a mixed grill, and there was a note saying:

The meat is in the oven, sir.

Chipped potatoes, white and fresh, were in a basket next to a saucepan of fat, there were some frozen vegetables standing ready for the pot. Rollison shook his head in regretful self-denial, and went out of the kitchen door and down the fire escape; that kitchen door was self-locking, so that no one could tell whether it had been closed from the inside or the outside. His footsteps clanged a little on the iron as he went down, but none of the youths was in the yard.

Rollison crossed this, and went to the corner of Gresham Terrace. A police patrol car with men in plain-clothes was crawling by, and two of the youths moved smartly across Gresham Terrace towards Number 22.

"I hope they don't have time to do much damage," Rollison said with feeling, and winked at the driver of the patrol car. Then he walked rapidly towards Piccadilly, and took a taxi to Middleton Street, Chelsea. He had not yet seen the Blakes, who as far as he knew were the only people who might be able to explain the attack on Jimmy Jones.

He knocked at the door of Number 24, and immediately there was a response, but no elderly person opened the door; instead a solid-looking man, obviously a Yard man in plain clothes, barred Rollison's path. Then he recognised the visitor, and sprang almost to attention.

"Thanks," said Rollison, and smiled. "Old folk at home?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"How are they?"

"Oh, they're much better now," said the plainclothes man. "Nearest thing to a miracle I've ever seen."

"Miracle?" echoed Rollison, blankly.

"That's the word, sir! When I first saw them they looked ready to pass out, they hadn't a stick left whole, and the fact that the neighbours were very kind didn't make all that difference. Of course it helped, but—well, then this morning the new furniture and everything arrived. Wonderful lot of stuff, sir, and a bigger and better television set. Wonderful people, those Jepsons."

"So the Jepsons did that," said Rollison, and had a mental image of Ada, so dumb-blondish and yet so shrewd. "Bless their hearts. Ask the Blakes if they can spare me five minutes, will you?"

"I'm sure they'll be glad to," the plainclothes man said. "Mr. Blake's in the kitchen, Mrs. Blake's upstairs with Jimmy Jones and Miss Jepson. Didn't you know Jones was back?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN
Transformation

In the small house there was transformation. Rollison could tell this as he entered the narrow hallway, saw the front room on the right filled with new furniture, a new carpet; everything a home needed. He could see the rough to the kitchen, and a small room also on the right; there was bright newness everywhere. An elderly grey-haired man stood up from a chair, and revealed a television set; it was as if he had been watching the blank screen.

He came forward.

"Mr. Blake, this is Mr. Rollison," the plainclothes man said. The grey-haired man, with his clear skin and steady blue eyes, looked puzzled for a moment, and then exclaimed:

"The Mr. Rollison? The one they call the Toff?"

The Yard man chuckled.

"That's him, Mr. Blake."

"This really *is* an honour," Blake said eagerly, and put out his hand, as if not certain that the Toff would take it; his grip was firm, his eyes told of his delight. "Martha will be delighted, she really will. Why, I must have been reading about you for twenty years!" He pumped Rollison's hand again, and called: "Martha, Martha dear! Come on down at once, we've a visitor, you'd never believe . . ."

His wife was small, plump, comely and grey-haired; and obviously a little overwhelmed by the transformation and the generosity of the Jepsons. The Toff was gentle and understanding; and it was Blake who led him upstairs. He could hear Ada talking, in a quick, light voice, which suggested that she hadn't a serious thought in her head; just prattle. Then Blake opened the door, and said:

"Jimmy, do you think you could stand another visitor for ten minutes?"

Ada jumped up.

"It's past time I left, I didn't realise I'd stayed so long, please don't let me keep anyone away. I—" she looked past Blake at Rollison, and broke off, her eyes widening and her lips pursed in a little O as if of astonishment; that was the way she looked whenever she was really surprised. Then, swiftly and lightly, she went on: "But it's Rolly! Rolly dear, how nice of you to come as soon as you heard Jimmy was out of hospital. Jimmy, this is Mr. Richard Rollison."

"The Toff," whispered Blake, as an echo.

Rollison looked at James Matthison Jones, and greatly liked what he saw, although much of Jones's head was bandaged, and there was a plastered pad beneath his jaw on the right side. It was only a few days after the attack. There were bruises on his hands and his face which were not bandaged, but his mouth had not suffered, and his eyes were as clear and direct as a man's could be.

"Hallo," said Rollison, and took Jones's hand. "Throw me out if you're tired of talking, won't you? Hallo, Ada, nice to see you."

Jones seemed to find it difficult to make up his mind whether to look at Ada or at his new visitor. He compromised, smiling quickly at the Toff and then turning to the girl and saying: "Please don't go. I'm

perfectly all right now, and company's good for me."

"No, really, I must fly," said Ada, "I've promised to see a friend before dinner." She raised a hand to Jones, and turned and hurried out of the room, casting a swift sideways glance at Rollison. Blake went downstairs with her, and she chattered brightly all the way down, as if she could never be solemn and earnest.

Rollison stood by the open door and watched the man on the bed, who was now looking steadily at him, but his mind wasn't on that job; it was on the girl, her lilting voice, perhaps on all that she had already done.

The front door opened and closed.

Rollison closed the door, and moved forward, and Jones said hastily.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Please sit down."

"Thanks," said Rollison. "Are you as well as you look?"

"Oh, I'm all right *now,"* said Jones. A new expression surged into his eyes, his jaw seemed to thrust itself forward, and he went on in a hard voice: "All I want is to catch up with those swine. That's all."

"I'd leave it for a few days," advised Rollison lightly. "You wouldn't like to hit a man when he's down, would you?"

"I'd gladly knock the living daylights out of them, standing up, sitting up or lying down," said Jones, in the same hard voice. "I wouldn't worry about sentiment or the Queensberry Rules. They—" he broke off, and his voice squeaked. "Do you mean that the police have caught them?"

"No, but they ran into some trouble they weren't expecting," Rollison said. He let that sink in, enjoying the glint which sprang to Jones's eyes, and went on before Jones could comment. "You must be sick of questions, and I haven't come to worry you with many."

"Ask anything you like," said Jones, looking at him with a kind of admiration which could not be mistaken. "Did you actually catch up with them?"

"It was an accident," Rollison assured him earnestly. "Does Villiers Street mean anything to you on the day of the attack?"

"Oh, yes," said Jones. "I told the police about that."

"They're never sure that they ought to tell me that kind of thing," said Rollison, sadly. "Mind repeating it?"

"Of course not. I first saw these two fellows in Villiers Street."

"Do you always go that way home?"

"Usually."

"They followed you from there, did they?"

"They must have done."

"Had you seen either of them before?"

"No."

"No threats or menaces?"

"No."

"Any idea at all why they should set upon you?"

"Mr. Rollison," said Jones, leaning forward to add vehemence to his words, "I've told the police and I'll tell you now that I haven't the faintest idea what it was all about. As far as I know, I've no enemies. As far as I know none of my friends is associated with brutes of that kind. I can only believe that I was mistaken for someone else."

Rollison put his head on one side.

"You look moderately individualistic to me." Jones grinned.

"You know what I mean!"

"Yes, I think so. Could this have anything to do with your work?"

"I don't see how it possibly could," answered Jones, thoughtfully. "The police asked me that. As far as I can tell, everything at the office is perfectly straightforward. My money's on a case of mistaken identity, Mr. Rollison, although I know you'll probably say that it's the easy way out."

"Could be," conceded Rollison. "Where did you see these men in Villiers Street?"

"About half-way up—near Lytton Street and the barber's."

Rollison felt the sharp impact of that remark, but hoped that he had not allowed Jones to see that it startled him.

"Your regular barber's?"

"No. It's a bigger salon than several of them around there, and more expensive. I'd been there for a haircut only that day, and can remember every incident clearly. The chap who'd cut my hair was on the corner as I went by in the evening, and nodded to me. Italian type. I went straight up towards the Strand. I passed a small fellow, and there was a bigger chap a little way ahead. I saw him again at a bus stop, and he got off at the same stop as I did. He was the fellow who really began to knock me about," Jones said feelingly. "And one of these days—"

"I know. Was there anything special about the day's haircut?"

Jones looked puzzled. "What can be special about a haircut?"

Rollison chuckled.

"I know what you mean! Did anything unusual happen? Did you see anything change hands, for instance, or hear a conversation that might be private?"

"The only unusual thing was that I picked up a leaflet giving details of a beautiful hair competition," Jones said. "There's a girl in the office with lovely hair, and I thought it would interest her. So I took one of the leaflets away with me."

"Was the girl interested?" Rollison asked, as if this meant absolutely nothing, and the competition was quite new to him:

"Yes." Jones looked rueful, but didn't explain why. "That can't possibly have anything to do with the attack on me, though. I simply took this leaflet and gave it to Goldilocks. And she—"

"Goldilocks?"

Jones grinned.

"If you ever meet her, don't call her that or she'll probably slap your face. She has wonderful golden hair, and everyone calls her Goldilocks except to her face. For some reason she hates it."

"What's her real name?" asked Rollison, and tried to make that question seem casual, too.

He did not succeed. This young man was as sharp as they came, and would not easily be persuaded that Rollison would ask questions for the sake of them. He could see that Rollison's interest in the girl Goldilocks was deeper than that in the rest of the story. He did not answer for some seconds, then said very quietly:

"She's Evelyn Day, who works in the Buying Office at Jepsons.

She couldn't possibly know anything about this business." He was almost too emphatic, but did not volunteer any more information. Although he had answered all the questions quickly, and although his mind obviously worked at speed, he was looking pale and tired.

"Of course she can't," Rollison said soothingly, "but unless I see the whole picture I can't hope to get any results." He stood up. "Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?"

Jones said quietly: "No, Mr. Rollison, but there's one thing you can do for me."

"What's that?" Rollison expected some plea for the name and address of the assailants.

"If you see Miss Jepson, or her brother for that matter, tell them how warmly I appreciate what they've done, will you?" said Jones. "It was magnificent. They're always very generous, everyone who works for Jepsons is devoted to them, but this—" Jones sounded choked and looked about the room. "I know some people would say that it didn't cost them much, Jepsons could furnish a dozen homes from stock and not notice it, but that isn't the point. Will you tell Miss Jepson?"

"I certainly will," promised Rollison.

* * *

He left soon afterwards, drove to his club in Pall Mall, had a hurried dinner, and then telephoned Scotland Yard. Grice wasn't there, but a superintendent on duty said:

"Yes, Mr. Rollison. Four youths broke into your flat, and we caught them red-handed. Said they were looking for Mrs. Wallis. We got 'em before they did any damage at all. In fact the only breakage was a glass, one of them had helped himself to a whisky and soda, and threw the glass at our chaps. It broke against the door. They're being held at Great Marlborough Street, and they'll be up for a hearing in the morning."

If the magistrate remanded 'em for eight days, that would be four of the enemy out of the firing line," said Rollison hopefully.

"Wouldn't surprise me if Grice is planning just that," the superintendent said. "Or *you* are!" He gave a throaty chuckle.

Rollison rang off, then dialled a Mayfair number, and was answered by a man with a deep and resonant voice, the voice of a gentleman's gentleman, a butler beyond all reasonable doubt. His name was Forbes, and he had served the Jepson family for nearly half a century.

"One moment, sir, I will find out if Miss Ada is in."

Rollison held on, staring along the marble passage of this club, with its statues and its oil paintings of past members, its marble columns, its decorated ceiling, and its reminder of a dying age, for two women came walking along the passage with a man, quite animatedly.

"Mr. Rollison, sir," the voice said. "Miss Ada is in and will be glad to see you if you call."

* * *

The Jepsons lived at Maybury Square, one of the smaller squares which was still mainly residential. For a London house of the late Regency period it was not large, but it had much charm. The hall, the staircase and the rooms were furnished as they had been sixty or seventy years ago, and there was an air of good taste and yet a hint of

opulence in the manservant—not Forbes—who opened the door. Rollison caught a glimpse of a dining-room with great Waterford glass chandeliers hanging low over a table which could seat a dozen on either side.

Ada came hurrying down the stairs, bright-faced and eager.

"Rolly, darling, how sweet of you to come! I called your flat several times but there was no answer, so I supposed you were out after all these bad men again. Have you got any results yet?"

"Give me time," pleaded Rollison.

"Well, it's your own fault if I expect miracles, you're always performing them." Ada put a cool hand on his arm and led him along a quiet passage to a small room, of much charm, with its green and gold, its books and pictures, and the tapestry stretched over a frame with wools of a hundred colours and shades in a box divided into tiny sections. Half-a-dozen needles, all threaded, were stuck in the tapestry, and a picture of a woman's face was already half-formed. Over the mantelpiece was an oil painting of the same woman; Rollison knew that this was Ada's mother who had died several years ago.

"Do sit down, and tell me what you'll have," said Ada. "Brandy or a liqueur, and a cigar . . ."

So, she fussed; and when liqueur and a cigar were at Rollison's side, she went on: "Isn't Jimmy Jones a pet?"

"It wouldn't surprise me if the last thing in the world he'd want to be is a pet," said Rollison.

"Oh, not *that* kind of pet! I've always thought he was one of the most promising of the new people we're training, and Reggie thinks so too. He's only in the Buying Office getting experience, you know. Or did I tell you that? I suppose *you* wouldn't consider a place on the board, Rolly, would you, just as a kind of ideas man. The director's fees would be . . . No? . . . Well, think about it. What I was going to say was that good does sometimes come out of evil, I don't care what you say." She gave her bright, puckish smile, and her eyes were glowing. "Jimmy Jones has been infatuated by one of the girls in his office, a pretty little thing whose chief claim to fame would be as Lady Godiva. I must admit her hair *is* wonderful! But apparently she only just looked in at the hospital, and hasn't written to him, and I think he's cured of that piece of nonsense. He . . ."

Ada talked too much, as if to cover emotion.

Sitting and listening to her, Rollison reflected: "She's in love with this Jimmy Jones."

He was mildly surprised by the discovery, and could not be sure whether Ada was trying to conceal it, or whether this was her way of telling him why she was so anxious to find out why Jimmy Jones had been attacked.

". . . I mean, it could happen again, I suppose, and I'm positive that Jimmy himself knows no reason for it. Reggie agreed with me before he left—"

"Left?"

"Yes, he's gone to Ibiza for a week or two, the poor dear didn't have much of a holiday this year."

"Lucky him," Rollison said.

"Everything that happened to Jimmy Jones is so puzzling and

worrying," Ada went on hurriedly, and then paused.

Rollison leaned forward and said:

"Ada, I'm doing all I can to find out what's behind it all. One obvious possibility is that it's to do with Jimmy's job."

"Oh, that's absurd!"

"The whole thing is absurd," said Rollison lazily, "but facts are facts. He was attacked. He was one of eight different people who have been attacked as savagely and ruthlessly and by the same men. We only know the reason for one of the attacks, so far. We do know that the men who do the strong arm work are well paid—extremely well paid—and we won't get anywhere until we find out who's paying them."

"Well," said Ada, downrightly, "don't look at me. I'm not."

Rollison grinned.

"I think I'll believe that!" he said.

As he finished, he turned his head swiftly, and Ada gave a little gasp and jumped up from her chair. At the window there was a crash of breaking glass. Something heavy struck the curtains and then fell to the ground; a moment later a second missile hit another pane of glass and that smashed too.

Two halves of a brick were on the floor, and tied to each was a tress of lovely hair, one black and shiny as a raven's wing, the other like spun gold.

CHAPTER TWELVE
The Tresses

After the second crash, there was silence.

No wind stirred the curtains when they had settled again. No footsteps sounded in the square or in the house itself. Ada, standing by her chair and touching the arms, stared at the bricks and the tresses of hair, as if she would not believe that they were there. Then she moved quickly towards them, until Rollison said sharply:

"Stand still."

"But—"

"Just stay there," said Rollison, and put an arm round her shoulders. "Listen."

A long way off, there was traffic; that was all. No aeroplane droned, no one walked or drove or cycled past here, as far as they could tell.

"They must still be outside," Ada breathed.

"That's it," said Rollison, "and they're probably hoping we'll put our heads out of the window, and have other bricks at hand. Is there a room immediately above this?"

"Yes, the music room. Why?"

"I remember it," said Rollison, and then heard hurrying footsteps. When he reached and opened the door, white-haired Forbes appeared, looking anxious and alarmed. Behind him was the footman.

"Sir—"

"Stay here and look after Miss Ada," Rollison ordered. "Someone may try to get in at this window, but I don't think it's likely. They might smash another window and try to get in that way, though." He turned swiftly to the footman. "You go to the back, will you, and keep watch."

"But the police—" Forbes began.

"Keep near a telephone, and dial 999 if you must." Rollison turned and hurried towards the stairs. He heard footsteps behind him. Ada was there, refusing to be left with Forbes, undoubtedly scared but her eyes very bright; she was prettier when she was excited.

"What do you think they're doing?" she asked urgently.

"Scaring the wits out of us," said Rollison, and raced up the stairs with hardly a sound, heading for the music room. He recognised it from past visits; a long, narrow room with a grand piano, music stands, many instruments in their cases along one wall, and two violins, each a Stradivarius, also there; priceless things some of these, and irreplaceable.

The window was undraped.

Rollison opened it very cautiously; it was of the sash-cord type, and there was at least a possibility that this window was being watched. When it was open three or four inches so that he could hear as well as see outside, he crouched down and looked out onto the lamplit square, the few parked cars with their lights on and now, two cars which were driving past at speed. In the middle of the square was a fenced-off patch of grass and some plane trees.

"Anyone there?" breathed Ada.

"Can't be sure," whispered Rollison. "If that was just to show that they mean business there wasn't much point in it. They may expect someone to rush and open the front door, and if they do—"

He broke off.

"Seen someone?" hissed Ada.

"Yes," said Rollison, very softly. "There are several people by the fence, gathered round a tree, and crouching behind the parked cars." He could just make out the dark shrouded figures: there were seven or eight people in all, like attendants at a ghostly meeting. "One's standing by the front gate, too, they're ready to rush if the front door's open."

"But what on earth are they up to?"

"They're probably after my blood, and if they are we haven't much to worry about," Rollison said. "If they're after yours, and want to wreck this place—"

"Oh, *no!"*

". . . we'll need the police to stop them," Rollison finished. He watched the silent group, most of whom would have been hidden from people walking along the street; he saw them only because he was looking down on them. "But if we send for the police and squad men are rushed here, these chaps are as safe as houses. It's no offence to stand about in a group unless there's evidence of felonious intent."

"Oh, stop talking like a policeman," breathed Ada. "What are we going to do?"

Rollison looked down at her in the dark, and grinned.

"How important is your hall carpet?"

"It isn't important at all. Why?"

"You're bound to have some household sprays and some liquid ammonia in the house," Rollison said, hopefully. "How long will it take to get two or three sprays loaded?"

"Oh, only a few minutes," Ada looked up at him intently, and the light from the lamps outside put an added sparkle into her eyes. "You mean, let them rush in and then have the sprays ready to greet them?"

"Yes."

"Oh, goody!" Ada exclaimed, and swung round; her voice came from the doorway, a wraith of sound, "I'll fix it."

Rollison did not move at once, but saw two of the men move from the back of the car, and approach the house. He wondered if they were losing patience, and were going to force their way in. They disappeared. He heard a whisper of voices, and some words came clearly.

". . . couldn't've heard it."

"They were in the room, weren't they?"

"Saw their shadows," a man said.

"They might've gone out, might be another door," the first man guessed. "Give 'em two or three minutes, and we'll chuck another couple've bricks. I—*what's that?"*

A car had turned into the square, and headlights raked the roadway and the pavement, then flashed past.

"There's a rozzer," one of the men breathed. "Wait till he's past."

"Okay, Walk round the square."

"Okay."

Rollison saw two of them appear again, and knew that they were as nervous as they could be in case they ran into the police. He could not see the policeman they had noticed, but silently blessed him as he made his rounds. The shadowy figures were lost against the darkness between the lamps, except for two youths whom Rollison saw clearly for the first time. They were probably in their late teens. This wasn't the time to think about it, but Wallis and Clay had shown much cleverness by marshalling the Teddy Boys behind them; making use of hooligans who were always spoiling for a fight.

Or someone had been clever.

Rollison heard the policeman walking stolidly, and saw him draw close to the house. It was possible that he would notice the broken windows, and if he did—

He stopped.

His torchlight pointed towards the windows, and Rollison could see the glow but not the man himself.

If he had spotted that broken glass, he would go straight to the front door to make inquiries, and it didn't seem possible that he could miss it.

He might even blow his whistle.

Rollison saw one of the crouching youths straighten up. Before he could shout a warning, the youth flung a missile at the constable. There was a thud and a cry. The policeman swung round as the two youths leapt at him.

Shouting wouldn't help now, and might do harm. The policeman went down with the youths on top of him, and as they went Ada whispered from the doorway:

"We're ready."

"All right," said Rollison. "They've just attacked a policeman, I want to go down and look after him." He hurried past Ada towards the landing and the stairs. Forbes, the footman and a third, older man, were standing at the foot of the stairs. Two were armed with garden syringes, one with an insect sprayer. "As soon as I open the door, they'll swarm in," Rollison warned. "Let 'em have it full in the face. Ada, dial 999 and ask for the police. They'll get here just about the right moment."

He watched her turn towards a telephone in an alcove in the wall as he went to the big front door.

He was not sure what the waiting youths wanted.

They may have trailed him cleverly, and waited until now to attack. If they were working under Wallis's orders, they might have come to kill, almost certainly to maim. Or they might have come to kidnap him, and take him to some quiet place where they could make him talk.

He heard Ada speak into the telephone.

He opened the front door.

He saw the hall light stream out on to the faces of three youths who were crouching on the porch, and on others in the road. All of them broke into a run the moment the door opened.

If they'd come for him, he would soon know.

They came swiftly, eight young brutes, each carrying a heavy hammer or an axe. Two struck at Rollison as they passed, but that was

only to drive him aside so that they could get in.

These were wreckers; and inside was the house of such grace, and the furniture of such antiquity and beauty.

Rollison shot out a leg, tripped one man up and dug an elbow into another's waist so that he went staggering. Then he reached the porch. Two more youths were on the pavement, keeping a look-out, and the constable was still on the ground. He was grunting, and trying to get up. One of the two look-outs stepped towards him, foot drawn back to kick.

"I shouldn't," said Rollison, in the softest of soft voices. The youth spun round, hammer raised in his hand. The other, guarding the approach from the right, also turned round, and for a moment Rollison was between them. They began to approach stealthily, menacingly.

Then wild screams began to come from the hall.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
Flight

Ada Jepson put down the telephone as Rollison stepped out of the house, and stood watching as the youths streamed in. She wasn't sure how many were there. They were all young, their hair was beautifully waved and groomed, they wore the narrow trousers and the wide shouldered coats of their kind—and their faces were savagely intent, their weapons were raised as if all they wanted to do was to find something to smash, and to smash it. They had come in with such a rush that they hadn't seen the three men standing to receive them; but suddenly the liquid ammonia hissed out from the syringes and the sprays, striking at eyes and mouths and noses. One moment it looked as if the house would be wrecked by the attacking brutes; then they began to stagger and to fall and to squeal and to scream. Their weapons dropped, they put their hands to their eyes to try to stop the pain of the ammonia as it bit at them. One raised his voice to such a screaming pitch that it drowned all other sound.

Forbes stopped spraying.

"That will be sufficient," he announced firmly, and turned to Ada. "Are you all right, Miss Ada?" She looked at him silently and nodded, and he went straight towards the door. "Mr. Rollison advised us to shut the men in, and so make sure that they couldn't get away," he said. "I will make sure that he is not hurt, and then—"

Before Forbes finished, two cars drew up in quick succession. The footsteps of running men sounded, and one car engine roared as the car spurted to catch up with the men. A car door opened, policemen jumped out and came running, and Rollison's voice sounded quite clearly and cheerfully:

"Help yourselves inside, chaps. Don't worry about the constable, he's all right."

* * *

Rollison helped the fallen policeman to his feet, and stood by while the men from the Flying Squad cars stormed into the house, their shadows thrown out on to the porch and the street. Another car had stopped at the far end of the square; the two look-out youths had been caught and were on their way back.

"What's it all about?" demanded the constable, weakly.

"Just a wrecking party," Rollison said mildly. "The Jepsons must have upset someone. Sure you're all right?"

"Lucky thing they didn't knock my helmet off first," the constable said, "but I'm okay sir. Who are—" he peered into Rollison's face, and his eyes widened in a way which was so familiar. "Isn't it Mr. Rollison?"

"Yes."

"Now I'm beginning to understand," the constable said. "You're mixed up in it. No offence meant, sir!"

"None taken," said Rollison solemnly, and went into the house.

The smell of ammonia was so strong that it made him cough, and his eyes began to smart.

The Yard men seemed to be crying, too, and so did Forbes, the

footman, the old man and Ada. The youths were standing, handcuffed and gasping for breath; all eight were lined up ready to go.

Now all we want is the Black Maria," said Rollison brightly. "Eight more for the can, sergeant." He recognised the plainclothes man in charge. "You'll want a statement, of course, and it's as simple as this ..

Half an hour later, the hall was almost free of the smell of ammonia, and that of a strong disinfectant helped to disguise it. The carpet was damp where it had been scrubbed, but there was no sign of damage anywhere; not even on the walls. The policemen and their prisoners had gone, Forbes and the other men were back in the domestic quarters, and Ada, her eyes still watering a little and her nose red where she had blown it so often, stood in front of Rollison and looked up at him, rather like an earnest canary.

"Did you expect that raid when you came?" she demanded.

"Didn't dream of one," Rollison told her, and sipped a long, soft drink; all alcohol mixed badly with his ammonia-tainted palate. "Ada."

"Yes?"

"You must know why they came."

"I haven't the faintest idea," Ada assured him earnestly. "Why, it's absolutely crazy. What did they hope to gain by it? *I've* no enemies, and I'm sure Reggie hasn't. When he hears about this he'll come rushing back. I do hope it's all over before he arrives, he does take such chances. Not that taking chances makes it much more dangerous, I suppose; after all you take enough." She said that quite flatly and factually. "I really can't believe the truth, Rolly, that they just came here to wreck the place. Apart from the wicked vandalism of it, it—it's so *pointless.* Who could hate us like that?"

Rollison eyed her thoughtfully, wondering if she was really as innocent and ignorant as she pretended. He doubted whether anyone else in the world would have suspected that she might be hiding something, for she looked so like a solemn child. He squeezed her arm, and said:

"We're on the way to finding out. You know what I'd think if I weren't such a gullible beginner, don't you?"

"You? A beginner? Don't make me laugh, Rolly, tell me what you'd think."

"That you didn't come and ask me to find out who had attacked Jimmy Jones because you were so worried about him, and wanted him avenged, but because you knew that this kind of thing might happen, and were anxious to find out who was behind it."

She shook her head, briskly.

"It might look like that, Richard, but it simply isn't true."

He looked at her sceptically for a long time. She met his gaze without wilting, and gave no sign that he had touched her on a sore spot. "Why is Reggie away just now?" he asked abruptly.

"I told you. He's having a holiday."

"Didn't he have any holiday this winter?"

"I told you that too. But even if he had, he can have one in the summer and the autumn if he wants it." She was quite sharp.

"Do you know why he chose to go just now?"

"No."

"When did you know he was going?"

"Only a day or two before he left. I don't like this kind of cross-examination, Richard."

"I don't like people being beaten up," Rollison said. "I don't like policemen being attacked on their beat. I don't like homes being wrecked—not even yours. I don't like young girls being terrified by hooligans who cut off their hair." He went to the corner of the little room, bent down and picked up the two bricks with the tresses of hair tied to them, and saw Ada's eyes widen. Probably she had forgotten them, and had only just realised that he hadn't told the police about them. "In fact I don't like any part of this, Ada, and I want to know the truth. Why did Reggie go away?"

"He was tired, he needed a rest! Must you keep calling me a liar?"

"He's thirty-one years old and fighting fit, he had a month away in January—"

"What business is that of yours?" Ada cried. "I'm trying to find out," Rollison said. "Was he being menaced or frightened?"

"No!"

"Do you know that he wasn't, or are you just guessing?"

"It's a ridiculous suggestion! I know that I asked you to try to find out who did that beastly thing to Jimmy Jones, but if you're going to make this kind of wild accusation, the quicker you withdraw from the case the better."

"I'm in it too deep to back out now," Rollison said, and his voice was sharp and his expression almost accusing. "Let's have the truth, Ada. Why did Reggie run away?"

"He didn't run away!"

"He ran away and left you holding the baby, and you came to me hoping I might be able to take it from you."

"You're just making it up."

"I'm trying to make sense of the facts," Rollison said. "And I'm trying to make you realise that it's no use holding anything back. What's Reggie done? What made him run? What are you covering up for?"

He thought she would fly at him.

Instead, she spoke in a very quiet voice, and with a dignity which sat surprisingly well upon her.

"You are quite mistaken, Richard, and I'm sorry that I can't make you see it. My only purpose in asking you to find these men was to try to make sure that what had happened to Jimmy couldn't happen to anyone else. This attack here is as much a mystery to me as it is to you. If you won't believe that, there is nothing I can do about it. Now I hope you'll go. I'm feeling very tired."

That was dismissal with a vengeance.

"I'll go," Rollison said, and weighed the bricks in each hand, the raven black tress hanging from his left, the fair one from the right. The lights in that were like spun gold, and the feel of the hair was silky and soft, as if he were touching the hair upon a woman's head. "Did you say that this forlorn love of Jimmy Jones's was golden-haired?"

"Yes."

"Her name is Evelyn Day, and she's called Goldilocks. Do you know where she lives?"

"As it happens, I do," said Ada, coolly. "She was sick a few weeks ago, and I always write a card to sick members of the staff—I do it from here. Her address will be in my book." She went to a writing cabinet, opened it, looked at a leather-bound address book, and then said: "She lives at 88 Chester Street, Ealing."

"Thanks," said Rollison, more easily. "All right, Ada, I'll tell you when there's anything else to report."

She didn't answer.

"And I hope you'll tell me when you realise that it isn't any use dodging issues any longer," Rollison went on. "It won't be long before the police start asking these same questions. Once they begin to wonder what is worrying Reggie, and why this house was selected, they won't be put off very easily."

Ada said coldly: "There is nothing I can tell you, the police, or anyone."

Rollison shrugged and nodded and turned away. Ada was still looking at him when he went out of the room, but not when he reached the front door. Forbes, with the precision of a good butler, was at the door to open it for him, to wish him a formal good night, and to watch him step into the lamplit square, into the fresh air, into the orbit of the two plainclothes men now watching the house. Rollison said good night to them as he went to his car. Opening the door, he wondered if this had been slashed, like the Rolls-Bentley.

It had not.

He let in the clutch and drove off, and was quite sure that no one followed him. It was early, but London seemed empty in these residential squares and also seemed ill-lit. Here were places for thieves to lurk, for wreckers to lie in wait, for vicious men to strike.

Where next?

Why the Jepsons' home?

Why had Reggie gone away with so little warning? That was an angle: to find out what he had been doing lately, whom he had mixed with, whether he had seemed scared of unknown dangers. For a while pride would stop Ada from talking, and it was possible that she really knew nothing. The fact that Rollison had upset her didn't greatly matter; the fact that she had shown how angry she was suggested that she might have a guilty conscience.

Rollison reached his flat.

Jolly should soon be back from taking Stella Wallis away, but now the flat was in darkness. The police still had a man in Gresham Terrace, but no one else was about. Rollison went upstairs, slowly and thoughtfully, trying to decide what he should do next.

If only he knew the motive; if only he could find the connection between the seven people—eight people now—whose homes and premises had been wrecked, and who could so easily have been ruined.

Was Donny Sampson the reason?

Rollison turned the key in the lock of his front door, opened the door a fraction, and listened intently; but he heard no sound. It would not be the first time that men had lain in wait for him, and he wanted

to make sure that no one had avoided the police.

No one had.

As Jolly wasn't back, there were no messages, nothing to keep Rollison here, and there was plenty for him to do.

He went downstairs again, got into the hired car and proved that its acceleration was as good as the driver had promised. It was nearly ten o'clock, and Jolly had been gone a long time; but he mustn't start worrying about Jolly, who could look after himself.

Rollison drove to Chester Street, Ealing, where a light was on in the hall of Number 88. He rang. A man opened the door almost at once, stared at him in surprise, took a stubby pipe from his lips and said:

"Thought it were our 'Arry," in a voice that had been acquired on the broad Yorkshire moors.

"Is Miss Evelyn Day in?" asked Rollison.

"Who wants her?" There was sharp suspicion in the deep voice. "If you're another policeman . . ."

"What have policemen been after her for?" demanded Rollison sharply.

Before the man could answer there were swift footsteps in the hall. A girl appeared, with a towel fastened turbanwise round her head. Her eyes were swollen and red with crying.

"Why don't you find out who did it?" she cried. "Why don't you find my hair?"

She had been attacked coming home from the pictures, and held by two men while a third had cut off her hair.

Rollison turned into Gresham Terrace again, glanced up, and felt sure that he would see a light on in his living room, the sign that Jolly was home; but the window was dark. He saw the Yard man coming towards him.

"Everything's quiet, sir, I don't think you'll have any more trouble with those devils."

"My man isn't back, then?"

"Seen no one, sir, except the couple from the ground floor. They'd been out at the pictures, and they satisfied me as to their identity."

"Ah, thanks," said Rollison, and walked briskly upstairs, leaving the car parked in Gresham Terrace, feeling much more uneasy than he looked. He had expected Jolly back just after nine o'clock at the latest. For the first time since seeing poor Goldilocks Day, he forgot her and her little tragedy.

He made cautious entry into the flat, checked the time with an electric clock, and looked worriedly at the telephone. It was twenty minutes past eleven, and Jolly would certainly have telephoned if this were an accidental delay.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
Jolly

Jolly sat with Stella Wallis in the back of the large, smooth-running car which had been sent from the hire service. He had told the driver where to go, and the woman hadn't protested, hadn't yet spoken a word. Either events had stunned her, or she was beginning to succumb to the sleeping dose which Rollison had put into her drink.

The light from street lamps showed that her eyes were wide open. Jolly glanced at her from time to time, aware of the pleasant scent she used, and not unaware of her closeness. He kept hoping that her head would loll forward as she lost consciousness, but ten minutes after they had started out, her eyes were still wide open.

He felt her hand move into his.

She squeezed.

It was a long time since any woman had behaved like that with Jolly, and it not only startled but shook him. He drew his hand away and glanced at her less with embarrassment than with dry amusement. She was smiling at him. Her eyes were narrowed now, but open quite wide enough, and her lips were parted, too; he could see the polish of the lipstick and the gleam of her white teeth. She was a good-looking woman, and knew what she was about.

She pressed his leg, gently.

He could ease away; or he could pretend that he had noticed nothing; or he could tell her to sit back in her corner. He took the line of least resistance, telling himself that if he made no response, she would soon get tired of this little game. He stared straight ahead. She squeezed his leg gently, and then moved so that she was cuddled close against him. Her right hand went to his cheek.

She didn't speak; but he could feel her warm breath on his face.

He sat absolutely motionless for a moment, then he freed his hand, and said with strained courtesy:

"You are wasting your time, I assure you."

He took her hand away from his cheek, but she went on pressing close against his side, as if determined that he would not be unaware of her nearness or her charms.

"Mrs. Wallis, please be good enough to realise that this is quite pointless," he said more firmly.

The chauffeur in front of the glass partition could not hear any of this.

"Mrs. Wallis!" Now Jolly was sharp.

She let him go, but before he realised what she was going to do, moved again, seized his face between her hands, pulled his head down, and kissed him. He felt the soft warmth of her lips, the sharpness of her teeth as he struggled to free his head, but she had him in a hold that was hard to break.

"You're so sweet," she said, cooingly, "you're so quaint, darling, why don't you relax a little? No one would mind if you just relaxed." She kissed him again, lingeringly, and his head was still imprisoned. He could not free himself without hurting her. "Just relax, darling," she breathed, and he could only just see her face and her eyes as she

looked at him.

He could stand outside himself, as it were, and see all this, the absurdity of it, the ludicrousness. He, Jolly, in charge of this woman, helpless under her grasp, fighting against her blandishments. He felt worse than he had ever felt in his life. He must stop her nonsense, it mustn't matter if he hurt her. He took her wrist at last, and twisted sharply, and she gasped and fell back.

"I am sorry," he said stiffly. "You left me no choice."

She looked at him intently, showing no resentment.

"Poor, poor darling," she said in that soft, cooing voice. "Aren't you allowed any life of your own? Do you have to do everything that Rollison tells you? Won't he even let you have a kiss or a little cuddle without permission? Why don't you be a *man,* Jolly?"

"This discussion is quite pointless."

Stella Wallis gave a curiously cooing laugh, and Jolly felt its barb and knew that in a way she was right: he was behaving like a pompous prig. He had to. He was serving Rollison, and had to take this woman to the cottage. She did not exist as a woman, simply as a prisoner of the Toffs, so he dare not relax. It did not matter how much of a fool she made him feel. At least there was only half an hour or so longer.

He could draw the driver's attention, but the man was concentrating on the out-of-town traffic, and Jolly did not want to look a fool as well as feel one.

"Jolly," Mrs. Wallis said, and slid her hand to his again. "Don't be silly, pet, you—"

She stopped abruptly, to stifle a yawn. Jolly's hopes rose. She would soon lose consciousness, and the embarrassing business could be forgotten.

She pressed close against him again.

"Jolly, honey, you really are so sweet," she said huskily. "You're wasted working for a man like Rollison—why don't you relax, and be nice to me? I'll put in a word for you with Tiny, you won't get hurt."

Will you kindly take your hand away, madam, sit back in the corner, and stop behaving like a woman of the streets."

She drew back abruptly, and next moment she sneered:

Tut I'm not that kind of a woman, Jolly, I'm very particular about my men friends. Do you know what will happen to you when my husband hears that you took me away?"

"Your husband will doubtless spend most of the rest of his life in prison, where he most rightly belongs," Jolly said coldly.

She stared, then laughed again. This time he could feel her quivering, as if she was helpless with the laughter. She patted the back of his hand, instead of squeezing, and said marvellingly:

"You're wonderful, Jolly, you're priceless! I didn't think that anyone like you still lived. It's such a pity."

She kept still in her corner for some minutes, and Jolly began to breathe more freely, but he was still too close to her to feel that the absurd crisis was over. He smoothed back his ruffled hair, and was tempted to wipe the lipstick off his lips, for he could feel it on them; but he did not. There was probably lipstick on his shirt and collar, too; he must never be seen like this.

"Jolly," the woman said, "how about telling the driver to turn round and take me home?"

"That is impossible, and you know it."

"It would be worth a pony, Jolly."

"Fifty pounds or five hundred, that is immaterial," Jolly said, and realised that he still sounded like a pompous fool, but he could not prevent himself. "Will you kindly resign yourself to the fact—"

She began to laugh again.

In the middle of the laughter, while his face was going scarlet, and he had to restrain himself from slapping her, she yawned. This time she couldn't suppress it; she realised that and was frightened. She clutched Jolly's hands, but this was no part of an attempt to seduce him, he could sense her fear.

Now don't worry, you'll be quite all right," he said in a much more normal voice.

"You don't know Tiny," Stella said, and her voice quivered helplessly. "You don't know—" She fell forward against him, dead to the world.

He eased her back into her corner, took out his handkerchief, and dabbed the sweat off his forehead. Then with great deliberation he wiped his lips and his fingers, and ran his fingers about his face so as to make sure that there was no lipstick there; he would not be satisfied until he had a mirror.

He felt cooler and much more himself, but still a little disturbed, when he looked about to see where they were. This was Wimbledon Common. They would soon be on the Kingston Bypass, and not far beyond the end of the bypass was the cottage where he had to deliver her. There an old family servant of the Rollisons would make sure that she was well cared for but did not escape. It was half an hour's journey at most.

There was a lot of traffic on the bypass, and some of the drivers coming in the opposite direction kept their headlights full on; it was difficult even for Jolly to see, and driving must be very trying.

Then he began to fear that a car was keeping very close to them.

He could not be sure that it was always the same car, sidelights and headlights looked very much alike from the mirror, but one certainly seemed to be keeping the same distance all the way. Others whipped past, and they themselves passed slower traffic; but the one car was behind all the time.

Ought he to warn the driver?

He leaned forward to do so as the car behind pulled out, and then roared past. A man and woman were in the front seat, and neither so much as looked at him. Jolly relaxed and reproved himself. But he would be glad when this evening's drive was over, he had never felt so futile or foolish in his life. He hoped he would never have to see this woman again, every time he did it would remind him of tonight.

He closed his eyes, not really dozing, but finding the quiet hum of the tyres and the steady breathing of his charge soothing. Whenever he opened his eyes the other traffic was passing swiftly, until they went off the bypass, then through Esher; soon they would have to turn off. The driver knew the place well, and slowed down, obviously looking for it. The woman didn't stir.

They turned off, into a narrow, winding road, and only a mile or two along there would be a lane leading to the cottage; there was no more secluded spot near London. Jolly relaxed completely, and was not even uneasy about the lipstick; was not uneasy when a car passed them, and pulled over rather too sharply. Foolish driver. Another car was just behind, and was about to pass.

Then, the rear lights of the car in front blazed in scarlet warning. Jolly's driver jammed on his brakes. The car behind came up so swiftly that Jolly held his breath, waiting for the crash. It did not come. He was aware of men jumping out of the car in front, others out of the car behind.

"They're Wallis's men," Jolly gasped aloud.

He tried to get out of the nearside door, but before he opened the door two youths were there in the light of the headlamps. He saw the face of the man Wallis, a face he knew from photographs which he had studied that day. He saw the savage glitter in this man's eyes.

Wallis didn't speak.

Two youths dragged Jolly from the car, and another dragged the driver out; and then as he staggered along the road, Wallis struck Jolly.

It was the most dreadful thing Jolly had known in all his life.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
Cause For Hate

"All right, Mr. Rollison," the night superintendent at the Yard said, "I've got all that. I'll have the road between here and Esher specially patrolled, and I'll get the Surrey police to co-operate. If anything went wrong, we'll soon know. The most likely thing is an accident, of course."

"Yes," said Rollison, bleakly. "I know. Thanks. You'll make sure they do a thorough job."

"As thorough as you'd do yourself," said the superintendent with unconscious humour; but for once Rollison did not see the joke. He muttered: "Thanks," and rang off.

It was now midnight.

He had been tempted to use the other car and drive along the road that Jolly had taken, but it had been impracticable, and would only be a waste of time. He had told himself that he would wait until midnight before calling on the police for help, and had called them at ten minutes to twelve. They now knew everything, except that Jolly had been with Wallis's wife.

Rollison lit a cigarette, drew two or three times at it, then jumped up, strode to the cabinet, and poured himself a drink. Glass in hand, he stepped to the big desk. On it were the two bricks with the tresses of hair tied to them. They'd been tied securely, someone had done quite a job, and meant to make sure that the hair didn't come off.

Why?

They had come to raid the Jepsons' house, remember, not to attack him. So the message in that hair had been meant for Ada or her missing brother; it could have been meant for no one else.

What could two tresses of hair convey to Ada? What could they convey to anyone?

What was the connection between them and the attack on Leah Sampson?

He could picture that girl now, crying and despairing, and could see the compassion on her father's face—and the white patch where the hair had been cut off so savagely close to the scalp.

These things must add up.

The telephone bell rang.

He was within two yards, and it seemed that the bell hadn't stopped ringing before it was silenced, and the ear-piece was pressing close against Rollison's ear.

Let this be Jolly: above everything else, let this be Jolly. Not simply news of him, but Jolly himself.

"Rollison speaking."

A man said in a hard, unrelenting kind of voice: "Found him yet?" and rang off.

* * *

That caller had been Wallis, there was no doubt of that.

Now something added up in Rollison's mind, and its total meaning was terrifying. Wallis had caught up with Jolly and Stella Wallis, and he would have been in a livid mood. Fury at the way he

had been man¬handled and at the disappearance of his wife would combine with his normal jealousy to make him more deadly than ever.

"Found him yet?"

Found him where?

Alive?

It would be easy to act blindly, and to make a fatal mistake. That had been Wallis, but there was a possibility, that the call had been bluff, that Jolly wasn't hurt.

Forget it.

There was a much greater probability: that Wallis had called believing that Rollison would be in no mood for caution, hoping that he might lose his head in his desire to find Jolly.

"Found him yet?"

Found him where?

The telephone bell rang again.

It might be a second call made simply to tear his nerves, to try to drive him into impetuous action. But it was too soon after the first call for that to be reasonable. It might be—anyone. Ebbutt, Grice, Ada.

Nonsense.

No one would ring at this hour, nearly half past twelve, without a very good reason: such as Scotland Yard with news of Jolly. Only seconds passed while Rollison hesitated and the telephone kept ringing on a subdued note; Jolly had arranged for it to be subdued in this room, and loud in his bedroom. Nowhere else. Jolly. Rollison seemed to watch his own hand as it moved, grasped the receiver and put it slowly and deliberately to his ear.

"This is Rollison."

"One moment, please, Superintendent Benson would like a word with you."

Benson was the night man in charge at the Yard. Rollison found himself clenching his teeth, sensed rather than felt the pain that the clenching caused at his jaws. He stared at the trophy wall, standing within reach of it; close to him were the two tresses of hair.

Why the hell didn't Benson come on the line?

He came.

"Rollison?"

"Yes."

"Hmm," Benson grunted. *Get on with it.*

"Better come right out and tell you. We've bad news about Jolly."

Rollison said softly, carefully and clearly: "What kind of bad news?" but it seemed to him that he knew the answer before Benson spoke again, because Benson was a tough copper. Benson wouldn't worry about reporting that a man had been beaten up.

"It's touch and go," Benson said.

But there was hope.

"Where is he?"

"Kingston Hospital. He's in the theatre—"

Rollison interrupted with a swift: "Thanks.

I'll go there," but he hardly realised what he said. He replaced the receiver and began to move. He went into his bedroom and took an automatic, fully loaded, from a locked drawer in his wardrobe, and clipped a knife round his forearm and another round the calf of his

leg.

Then he put on a cloth cap, which was rather high at the crown. Jolly should have had one. This was a refinement of the motor cyclist's helmet, and the sheet of steel inside would take the worst of any blow. Too late? He left all the lights on as he went to the landing. He was ultra cautious as he walked downstairs, and shadows of the landings and of cupboards seemed like the shadows of men; but were not. He reached the street door, and opened that as cautiously. The Yard man was strolling past.

Rollison went out.

"Going out again, sir?"

"Yes." Rollison was already opening the car door.

"I'll keep an eye—" began the Yard man, and then his voice was drowned by the snarl of the car engine. He shrugged and backed away, glanced upwards, and then shouted at Rollison so that his voice penetrated all the other noises. "OW he shouted. "Oi!"

Rollison jammed on the brakes, and the engine stalled. He put his head out of the window.

"What is it?"

"You've left your flat lights on!"

Rollison opened his mouth to storm, then caught up with himself, said with tense calmness: "Yes. Leave them, will you?" and drove off.

The Yard man stood staring at him, frowning as the car hurtled round the corner.

By night the hospital was brightly lit and quiet, with only those who must be moving about the corridors and the wards, most of the offices closed, most of the patients resting quietly, some with drugs to help them ease their pain. First, Rollison saw a night porter; then a senior porter; next a nurse; at last a Sister.

"The accident case that came in just after midnight," she said. "Yes, sir, he's in the operating theatre now."

"How is he, please?"

"I'm not yet in a position to say. Who are you, sir? His son?"

"I'm his employer, but that doesn't explain—Sister, please find out how he is, what his chances are. Ask a doctor to come and see me, someone who knows what he's doing. If it's a brain injury, then we've got to have Kempton here."

The Sister, small, dark and elderly, said in a startled voice: "Mr. *Kempton?"*

"That's right."

"I'm afraid we couldn't expect Mr. Kempton—"

Somehow Rollison controlled the tone and volume of his voice. He did not know how strange he looked, startlingly handsome, his eyes afire and his mouth set so that the words seemed to force themselves out in a kind of growl.

"I know Mr. Kempton. He is a personal friend. If my man needs him, he'll come. Please find out."

With great compassion and some awe, the Sister said: "I'll see what I can discover, sir. Will you sit down and wait?"

"Thank you." Rollison didn't sit down, and was tempted to follow her, but he did not. He paced up and down the passage outside her office, and seemed to be walking through the emptiness of time. Two

nurses passed talking, joking, glancing at him; and were sobered. A tall, dark young man who needed a shave went hurrying into a ward. The Sister came, also hurrying.

Rollison waited for her with growing, chilling fear.

"The operation is over," she announced. "Mr. Nott-Comber did the operation himself, and you can be quite sure that no one could have performed it better. It is just a question of waiting."

"So he's alive," Rollison made himself say.

"The operation was successful," the sister said, "but he lost a great deal of blood, and his life is still in the balance."

"When should we know?"

"If he's still holding on in the morning—"

"May I wait here?" asked Rollison, abruptly. "There is a waiting-room with a couch," the Sister told him. "I'll send a nurse with you, and then send you in a cup of tea and some aspirins."

"You're very kind," said Rollison, and startled her afresh with the warmth of his smile. "Thank you."

* * *

The couch was springy and comfortable, there were two cushions for his head, and the room itself was warm. Rollison loosened his collar, shoes and belt before the nurse came in, elderly, grey, tired-looking and disinterested. Rollison did not know what the tablets were, but felt fairly sure that they were not aspirins. He took them, and sat back. All the things that had happened began to go round in his mind, and he kept seeing pictures of the people involved, especially Wallis; Ada; the girl who had come so piteously to her father, with her lovely hair shorn; and Jolly.

Stella Wallis.

Over-confident, bragging fool, why hadn't he been satisfied with scaring her? He should never have taken her away. It had seemed a touch of genius at the time, but was it genius to have the police at his heels, and worried? Was it genius to lay Jolly open to such a risk as this?

Jolly.

* * *

He did not know what time it was when another Sister stood in front of him, next morning, a buxom woman with a high colour, bright blue eyes, and a smile which suggested that she remembered the merry days of her probationer life. She held a cup of steaming tea steady as Rollison blinked, became aware of a crick in the neck and that he was hotter than usual, and then remembered. Everything but dread vanished from his mind, and the dread showed in his expression.

"How is he?"

"He's got through the night, and has a fair chance," the Sister told him.

"Thank God for that! May I see him?"

"Dr. Morton is in charge now, and I expect he will allow you to, but Mr. Jolly is unconscious of course."

"Yes," said Rollison. "Thanks." He sat up and took the tea. "You're very good."

"It isn't every day we have the Toff staying here!"

He found himself smiling, sipped the tea, and as she turned to go caught sight of two young nurses at the door, obviously peeping at this visitor. They vanished as the Sister said:

"A Superintendent Grice of Scotland Yard is on his way to see you and the other injured man, Mr. Rollison."

"The other—" echoed Rollison, and then realised that thought of Jolly had driven everything else out of his mind, he had forgotten that there had been the hire car driver; and now he knew that the driver had been attacked, too. "Yes, of course. How is he?"

"Oh, he wasn't badly hurt, he'll be discharged from hospital this morning," the Sister said. "He'll have to be careful for a few days, of course."

"Big mercies," Rollison said humbly. "Thank you, Sister." He smiled again, finished his tea as she went out, rasped his hand over his stubble, and was wondering where to wash when a man approached briskly, tapped at the door and came in: a youthful, clean-cut man with sharp grey eyes and briskness in his manner as well as in his step.

"Good morning, Mr. Rollison. I'm Dr. Morton. If you'd care to come along to the doctors' quarters, we can fix you up with an electric razor and everything you'll need. Superintendent Grice is due in about twenty minutes, I'm told. I presume you know that your man Jolly is doing very well, everything considered?"

"Yes. Thanks." The doctor's briskness was refreshing.

Morton went on in that lively voice: "I saw him when he was brought in, and helped Nott¬Comber with him. Whoever did it ought to be given the cat once a week for the rest of his life."

"I know exactly what you mean," said Rollison.

He was taken to a large, bright wash-room, shaved and washed, and looked completely himself in twenty minutes, when a young intern took him to a kind of staff dining room. There at a table overlooking a lawn and some flowers was Grice, and Grice stood up, tall and spare and obviously very worried.

"I want to talk to you on the way back," he said. "I've seen the driver, and we know what happened. I understand you want to see Jolly first."

"Coming with me?" Rollison asked.

They stood together in the small private ward, with its window overlooking the grounds, its pale green walls, and its spotlessness. They looked at Jolly, whose face was bandaged so that he seemed only half a man; but his nose wasn't bandaged although it was bruised. He was so pale and still that he might almost be dead, and in Rollison there welled up a great hatred for the men who had done this thing. -

"Come on, Bill," he said in a stony voice. "I want to know all you've got under your hat."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN
Hero

A plainclothes man drove Grice's car; Rollison drove the hired Austin, trying not to hurry, intent on learning every fact he could. There were not many, but they filled in several gaps, for instance that Jolly's driver had not realised that they were being followed until they turned into the narrow road. He was sure that at least three cars had been involved in the chase, changing position so that no one could suspect that anyone had an interest in him and Jolly.

"While they were attacking Jolly, they talked," Grice went on. "A man made it clear that he'd had the approaches to Gresham Terrace watched by men in cars. A motor-cyclist had acted as a scout, and sent the cars after Jolly."

"As thorough as we'd expect," Rollison said. "Know who they were?"

"The usual hooligans doing what they're told."

"Wallis there himself?"

"We believe that the man in charge was Wallis, but it's impossible to prove it," Grice said. "It was dark, remember. Jolly's driver, our only witness, couldn't see this man properly and won't swear to his voice. And Wallis has seven so-called witnesses to give him an alibi."

"The same old game. What else?"

"Mrs. Wallis is now back in Dirk Street," Grice said.

"Here it comes," Rollison said, bleakly.

"Yes, here it comes," Grice's voice sharpened. "Why were you crazy enough to kidnap Stella Wallis? Didn't you realise that it would drive Wallis berserk?"

"I knew," said Rollison icily. "I also knew that Wallis had been at his foul business for months. That you couldn't stop him, and someone had to. I hoped that losing his wife would drive him into a big mistake. I even hoped I might be able to do a deal with him; his wife back in return for the name of the people employing him."

"I thought that was it," Grice said, more quietly. "You under-rated Wallis, of course. A lot of people have done that. A man has to be good to keep clear of us when we're really after him."

"Or you have to be bad."

"Rolly, take it easy."

"Can Jolly take it easy? Can the poor devils whom Wallis beats up, and whose homes he wrecks? Can the girls who lose their hair? Can't you even guess who's behind Wallis?"

"We guessed Donny, but haven't proved it yet," Grice said. "Human hair is fairly valuable, Donny is undoubtedly behind this competition, and practically every girl who's been shorn had entered for it."

"Have you been to Donny's shops? Examined the wigs and toupees?"

"We'll go the moment you get us a search warrant," Grice said dryly. "I can't, Rolly. I can't prove anything against Wallis, either. You may hate the man, you may think that he's the worst of his type we've ever had to tackle, but it's no use blinking at facts. It's a fact that he is

as courageous as a wild beast, and he sticks to his own code. No squealing and no squealers. That's why he's so dangerous. He's never been known to commit any crime except his speciality. We know some of the people who employed him in his early days, but he's learned to cover up perfectly. Obviously he gets paid big money. Probably he gets most of his results by threats—he doesn't have to use violence. Now and again he meets strong opposition, and that causes trouble."

"Have you any idea who he's fighting now?"

"No."

"What about these youngsters he uses?"

"If you mean the Teddy Boy types he works with, don't make any mistake about them," Grice said. "Wavy hair, broad shoulders, a velvet collar and stove-pipe trousers don't make a young brute, but a lot of young brutes are wearing the uniform, and far too many haven't any moral sense. You can't reason with them. I'm not sure you can frighten them. They're dangerous because they're reasonably well educated, they can tell a good tale, they can even impress with party manners. But for a fiver they'll do anything Wallis wants."

Rollison said bitterly: "Does he protect them from the police, too?"

Grice didn't answer.

Rollison put his foot down and the speedometer needle touched eighty along the bypass. Grice stared grimly ahead. As they neared Richmond Park, Rollison slowed down.

"Sorry if I'm rough," he said. "I blame myself for what happened to Jolly, and it's hard to take."

"Don't I know?" Grice asked. "We've been after Wallis for months. Every job he does seems my fault."

A grin forced Rollison's lips apart.

"If we can't stop him between us, we ought to retire. Bill." The last word was a sharp interrogation.

"Yes."

"Suspect the Jepsons?"

"I've only one reason to."

"What's that?"

"Some of Wallis's victims are indirectly associated with Jepsons."

"The family or the business?"

"The business."

"Any idea why their place was attacked last night?"

"I hoped you'd know," Grice said.

"I think Ada does, but she hasn't talked, and she isn't friendly with me any more." Rollison was trying to get himself into a less savage mood. "Check her, Bill, and check her brother Reginald, who decided to give himself a holiday in Ibiza. That's about as difficult a place to get to as he could find."

"Think he knew this was coming?"

"I think he might."

"Get anything out of the man Jones?" Grice asked abruptly.

"No. There's a thing I'd like to know more about, all the people who've been victimised, Bill. What's the link?"

"Association with Jepsons or customers of Jepsons," Grice said, "but as one person in four seems to fit that bill, it doesn't get us

anywhere. The victims won't talk, I've tried each one myself."

"I can try, too," Rollison said dryly.

They were at the top of Putney High Street, a quarter of an hour's drive away from Scotland Yard. It was warm enough to drive with both windows down, and Rollison felt sticky round the neck. A big lorry loomed up in the mirror behind him, and there was a small car in front of him, the driver of which seemed to be nervous; his brake light kept going on and off. Rollison changed gear on the steep hill, and the lorry loomed closer behind them, its driver pulling out to pass.

Rollison saw the red light of the little car in front of him go on again as if the driver had jumped on his brakes. Rollison braked sharply, glanced in the mirror, and felt his heart beat violently in fear.

The lorry was just behind him, getting nearer and there was no driver at the wheel. It was out of control, and Rollison couldn't go fast enough to avoid it because of the little car in front.

Grice began: "What the devil?" Then turned round, and gasped: "My God!"

"Jump for it," Rollison said with fierce urgency. "Open that door and jump for it."

He turned his wheel sharply, to pull out beyond the little car. In a split second he could be sandwiched between it and the lorry, and this car could be crushed like a concertina.

There was just room to squeeze through. The little car turned out, and baulked him.

Grice drew in a sharp, hissing voice.

"All right," Rollison said, tautly. "Hold tight, we'll have to let it hit us." The front of the lorry was no more than a yard behind, and the driving wheel without its driver seemed to mock at him.

Then another car drew alongside the lorry, and a man actually *stood* by the open door.

It was Grice's car.

A Yard man was clinging to the door, one arm and hand outstretched and one hand groping for the cabin window of the lorry. If he could get into the cabin and at the brake he might save them from disaster. Below Rollison was the crowded High Street, twenty or thirty cars drawn up at the nearest red stop light, and if he and the lorry crashed into them, there would be death and maiming and horror.

They were only a hundred yards away.

The Yard man leapt.

Rollison thought: "He's missed!"

But the man clung to the open cabin's window, then leaned forward and reached for the brake. Praise his cold courage.

The lorry began to jolt to a standstill.

"All right," Rollison said to Grice, who couldn't see in the mirror and was twisting round in his seat. "A George Medal for that chap, and I hope you promote him, too." He saw the lorry falling away behind him as the red light changed to green. The little car which had baulked him suddenly shot forward, and merged with the traffic, but was being stopped by a policeman. The driver was probably old or very young. Rollison pulled into the kerb, then took out his

handkerchief and dabbed his cold, damp forehead.

"They mean it, don't they?"

"I'll find out who's behind Wallis if we have to put every man in the C.I.D. on the job," Grice said savagely. "I've never had the wind up so badly."

"Me too." Rollison opened the driving door, watching the wing mirror carefully; it had suddenly become essential to behave as if everyone else on the road was mad. "I want a word with that hero, and I'd like to know what happened to the driver." He got out, and saw the lorry drawn up, the other police car just in front of it. A crowd gathered, and a little woman was standing on tip-toe and patting the Yard hero on the back. The man looked flushed, flustered and embarrassed.

Then Rollison saw the side of the lorry.

JEPSONS

it read:

Everything for the Needs of
the People

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
A Job For Ebbutt

"That may be the van which nearly ran into you before," Grice suggested. "I'll contact Jepsons, and find out all I can." He was still shaken, but pushed through the crowd to the Yard man who'd jumped and said:

"Coolest job I've ever seen, Morris. Thank you."

"Thank *you,* sir," Morris was tall, lean, youthful-looking, and smiling nervously.

"He ought to have the George Medal, at once," breathed a woman standing by.

Rollison shook Morris's hand.

"We're going to fix it somehow," he said. "When did you see that the driver had vanished?"

"Well, sir, I saw him get out of the cabin and climb into the back of the lorry itself—there are glass doors, you can see right through. There's a hole at the back of the cabin, too. He just hurried to the tail board, swung himself over, dropped down and ran. Must have done it plenty of times before, he was like India rubber. We had to go after him or else try and stop that lorry, and we thought we ought to have a cut at the lorry."

We!

"If that lorry had crashed goodness knows how many would have been killed and injured," the woman said.

Two uniformed police came hurrying.

"Ah," said Grice, and smiled at the woman. "I wonder if you will make a report and any recommendation you feel wise to one of these officers. Thank you, madam. Morris, get to your radio, will you, and ask Information to flash a call to Division to find out from Jepsons which of their vans is out and unaccounted for. Did you get a good look at the lorry driver?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give his description and put out a call for him. Then go straight to the Yard, and wait for me. Tell whoever is on duty that I don't want you out on patrol until I've seen you. If you feel a bit shaky, get yourself a nip. Right! I'll be seeing you."

Grice's crispness and control of the situation worked wonders. The woman began to talk to the uniformed men. The driver of the little car was elderly, in fact, had obviously not realized what had happened. He was allowed to go on, while Morris and his driver went back to Grice's own car.

"We'd better get on," Grice said to Rollison. They got back into the car, and started off. "That lorry which nearly caught you the other day was dark green, too. Could be that Wallis has a Jepson lorry at his disposal," Grice said. "I know, I know. It could have been stolen. Anyhow, it's time I saw Miss Jepson myself."

"You tackle the despatch department or the transport department about the lorries, but leave Ada to me for a while, will you?"

"Once she knows the Yard is after her—"

"Remember what you said about Wallis?" Rollison interrupted.

"Ada is another one who won't talk unless she wants to, and you won't be able to scare her into talking. Leave her to me for a bit."

"I may not be able to, I have to take orders," Grice said dryly.

"But you'll try," said Rollison. "Thanks." He sat back by traffic lights on the other side of Putney Bridge, and was surprised that he felt so I calm; but it was a false calm. "How about standing me breakfast at the canteen when we get to the Yard? Then let me check the names and addresses of Wallis's known victims."

"I don't know why I should buy your bacon and eggs," Grice said, "but I suppose I will."

"Thanks," said Rollison, a little more than an hour later.

At eleven o'clock, he was still in Grice's office. Except that all Jepsons' transport was accounted for, and the inescapable indication that the killer-lorry had been painted to look like a Jepson vehicle, nothing new had come in. Rollison had studied the list of the people who had suffered at Wallis's hands in the past few weeks. None was a thief, and none appeared to have been robbed; one or two had squealed on lesser crooks at some time.

"Have a go at making them talk," Grice said, "but don't blame them if they won't. Wallis is always standing at their shoulder."

"Right," Rollison said, and added very softly: "Before it's over, we may have to make Wallis himself talk."

"You watch your step," Grice warned. "I should think he hates you enough to kill you."

"The feeling could be mutual. Have you a spare photograph of him, and one of Clay?"

"I can send for them," Grice said, and had them in the office within five minutes.

Rollison left the Yard with the photographs in his pocket.

A C.I.D. man whom he recognised was sitting at the wheel of a small car near the end of Gresham Terrace. This man nodded to Rollison; and would certainly have called out if there were any reason for alarm. Rollison went up to the flat. He walked slowly, and felt jaded; it had been a night of drugged sleep and he would probably feel heavy-headed all day. He opened the front door of the flat with the caution which was now habitual; but it was empty.

There were several letters on the mat, as well as the newspapers. None of the letters mattered. Each of the newspapers except *The Times* carried the story of the hair thief, and of the attack on Rollison. One had scooped the story of the slashed Rolls-Bentley. A photograph, obviously taken in the garage, showed the damage and the white paint.

Rollison put the papers aside, and telephoned Jepsons.

"I'll see if Miss Ada is in, Mr. Rollison," a girl operator said.

Ada might still be annoyed, and this was the way to find out.

There was a long wait, before Ada herself came on the line, and spoke as if coldly.

"It is no use talking about it any more, Richard. I have nothing to add to what I said last night."

"Well, I have," said Rollison, then warned himself that it wouldn't help to lose his temper. "I've some new facts to show."

"I don't see how they can affect the matter."

"This one for a start," continued Rollison. "I was driving down Putney Hill with Superintendent Grice this morning. A lorry nearly crashed into the back of us, after the driver deserted his cabin. But for a policeman with a lot of guts, Grice and I would be in hospital. So would a lot of other people."

"I don't need telling that this is serious business," Ada said, sarcastically.

"Someone not only tried to kill Grice and me, but apparently tried to involve Jepsons by using one of their lorries," Rollison told her, and explained more fully. "Here's another fact: Jolly was attacked last night. He will take much longer to recover than Jimmy Jones did."

Ada drew in her breath sharply.

"I'm going to drop a note into your office in the next half hour and it will have several names and addresses on it," Rollison said. "I'd like you to have those names and addresses checked, and if there's any direct association between any of them and Jepsons, let me know. They might work for Jepsons, or buy from them. Check every kind of possible association with the firm, too."

Ada could ask why.

She said in a subdued voice. "All right, I'll get it done right away. I'm sorry about—"

She didn't finish.

"Ada," Rollison said softly, "I don't want to rub anything in. But it's a fact that you asked me to start on this job, and that as a direct result, Jolly is where he is now. I'm going to find out what lies behind it and who is behind it. I don't care who gets hurt. I don't care who gets in my way. You, Reggie, anyone in the world, I'm going to find what it's all about."

"I see," Ada said, soberly.

"Good-bye," Rollison said.

He rang off, took the list of Wallis's victims, put a portable typewriter on his desk, and at fair speed typed the list out with three carbon copies. He slipped one copy into an envelope addressed to Ada, sealed it, and put it with the others in his pocket. He was getting up when the telephone bell rang, and he picked the receiver up slowly. He felt as if he was at half pressure, and could not be sure that it was wholly because of the heavy sleep. The fact that he knew so little nagged at him; the fact that he couldn't see the next move clearly seemed to sneer at him. That was the trouble; he had never been so desperately anxious to hit back hard: and he couldn't see how to do it yet.

"Rollison speaking."

"Mr. Ar." No one could imitate Bill Ebbutt's voice, or the asthmatic way he breathed when he was agitated on the telephone. "Mr. Ar, is that right about Jolly? There's a rumour going around that —"

"It's right, yes."

"He's not dead?"

"He's got a fighting chance."

"Well," said Ebbutt after a pause, "if that's the case, my money's on Jolly. If ever there was a fighter, 'e's one. You okay?"

"So far, Bill."

"Mr. Ar, why don't you let me do something to 'elp?" pleaded Ebbutt. "I know the argument, and I couldn't agree wiv you more, you don't want to spark off a lot of gang fighting between my chaps and these Teddy Boys or Wallis's chaps, but this is above that kind've fing, Mr. Ar. This is personal. Any attack on Jolly is."

"Here's something you can do," said Rollison, quietly. "Send a couple of chaps to my flat, to stay here and take telephone calls and messages, and hand out treatment if any one tries to do what they shouldn't."

"I know, the kind wot c'n read and write," said Ebbutt brightly. "That's okay, they'll be on their way in a brace of shakes. Next?"

"I'm going to see Donny Sampson when I leave here, and I'll have a list of names and addresses with me—Wallis's recent victims. Study it, get your chaps to have a look at it, and try to find out any unusual connection among them—among all or any of them."

"Okay," said Ebbutt. "Will you drop the list in?"

"Have someone to pick it up outside Donny's, will you? I'll put a key of the flat in the same envelope."

"We'll pick it up."

"Thanks a lot, Bill."

"I don't mind so long as I c'n do somefink," Ebbutt said. "I don't like sitting back and watching you being pushed arahnd." Then unexpectedly he chuckled. "Mind you, I can't say I'm pessimistic, not after what 'appened to Stella Wallis and Wallis hisself yesterday. That kind've fing's never happened to him before." Then came the sting in the tale. "But 'e'll get you arter this, Mr. Ar. Don't take the slightest chance, will you?"

Rollison said: "I'll take every chance that looks as if it might come off, Bill. Did you know that the firm Jepsons was involved in any way?"

"First I've 'eard of it, except that one of their lorries was used yesterday morning, I meant to tell yer. My chaps saw the name on it. Could've bin stolen or borrowed, though. Watch out, Mr. Ar."

"Thanks, Bill," Rollison said.

Ten minutes later, he delivered the list at Jepson Buildings, and went from there to the barber's where Jimmy Jones had had his hair cut. Two chairs were full, but a bright-faced Italian-looking man was standing idle and hopeful. Rollison saw the *Hair Stylist* and some of the competition entry forms, took several of these from under the barber's nose, then thrust the photographs of Wallis and Clay under the man's nose.

"Ever cut this man's hair?" he asked, and a pound note appeared as if by magic in his hand.

The barber took one look at the photographs, and backed away.

"No, I haven't! I have nevair seen heem!" Fear was in his voice, the kind that Wallis always engendered.

The other barbers swore that they had never seen Wallis or Clay, either, but Rollison did not believe them.

They might be made to talk, but that could wait until everything else failed.

A little after one o'clock, Rollison reached Donny's. A tall, elderly man wearing a cap to cover a completely bald head, a grey polo

sweater and a pair of old, patched but spotless grey flannels, was waiting outside.

"You got that note for Bill, Mr. Ar?"

"Yes, Micky. How are you keeping?"

"Oh, I don't get no worse," the man said, wrinkling his big nose, "and I don't get no better. I can still walk." He smiled and turned and hobbled off, a Bill Ebbutt pensioner suffering grievously from rheumatoid arthritis.

Rollison went into the shop.

Obviously it was very busy. Machines hummed, each chair in sight through open doors was occupied, smartly-dressed and well-made-up girls were flitting about. It was equally obvious that there was tension here. The queen of yesterday was not behind the desk; another girl was wearing a turban round her head, almost as if she had just had her hair washed; but Donny would not allow the staff or a customer to sit like that behind the cash desk.

Rollison said: "Good morning. Is Mr. Sampson in?"

The girl didn't answer at once, but stared with her eyes narrowed, her lips set tightly; the way that Ada might have looked had he met her this morning; or Stella Wallis, last night. It seemed a long time before she spoke.

"Why don't you go back to your part or London and forget the slumming?" she asked bitterly.

"I'd prefer to see Donny," Rollison said mildly.

"He doesn't want to see you. None of us wants to see you any more. If you hadn't put your big nose in, this wouldn't have happened."

"What wouldn't have happened?" asked Rollison in the same mild voice, but now his heart was beginning to thump again: there seemed no end to the trouble that came without him knowing.

She snatched off the towelling turban and showed her fair hair, cropped close to the scalp. A woman without hair could look more naked than a nude.

"Now perhaps you're satisfied," she said viciously. "If you hadn't __"

"I'm not satisfied by a long way," Rollison told her softly. "Are you another of Donny's daughters?"

"It doesn't matter who I am, and I've talked to you quite long enough." She twisted the turban back expertly, and became a normal woman again. "It's happened to Leah and it's happened to me. Don't tell me you don't know why."

"I don't know why."

"Because you came to question Donny," the girl said with the same bitterness. She leaned forward and pointed a red-tipped finger at him. "Because someone thinks Donny could help you, and they've got to make sure he doesn't. They cut Leah's hair off and then they cut off mine, just to make sure he keeps his mouth shut. I'm his third daughter, if you really want to know: I'm Lila. I don't know what else they told Donny, but they threatened him with a lot worse than this if he has anything more to do with you. So why don't you go and buy yourself a long holiday?"

Two customers were coming out, and they stood listening.

Another coming in, stopped to stare. The machines whirred busily. Someone was talking in one of the cubicles, traffic passed noisily outside.

Then Donny appeared.

He looked older even than he had yesterday, and much more lined. There was sadness in his fine amber eyes and sadness in his gentle voice, too. He gazed with that familiar compassion at his daughter Lila, then turned to Rollison and said gravely:

"You must forgive Lila, she is so upset that she doesn't know what she is saying. I will gladly talk to you, but I cannot help you. I have no idea why such a thing as this should happen, no idea at all."

He did not smile; he looked saint-like, the kind of man to whom a lie would be not simply abhorrent but almost impossible.

But was he lying?

His daughter said with tears in her eyes: "You're crazy! You ought to kick him out."

"I'll go without being kicked when I know where you get the hair for your wigs and toupees," Rollison said to Donny. "How about it?"

Donny's expression did not change.

"Please come with me," he said, and Rollison went, aware of the girl staring at him as if she hated him.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
Wig-Maker

Donny walked past the door of the room where Rollison had sat yesterday, and led the way through a doorway at the end of the passage, and then up a short flight of steps. The paintwork was a more ordinary cream colour here, but the place was spotless; Donny did not just put up a front. As Rollison followed him along a narrow landing, seeing the bowed shoulders beneath the snow-white barber's coat, he found himself trying to reconcile two conflicting things.

Donny was rich. He owned dozens, perhaps hundreds of shops. He owned a great deal of valuable property. Yet he worked in one of his own shops, cutting hair for customers, actively managing the whole concern. He might have been expected to work from an office, and to leave all the donkey work to others.

What was the explanation?

Was he so rich as Grice had made out?

Or was he a miser?

He opened a door into a long, narrow room, with a north light, a room which might have served excellently for an artist's studio; but instead of canvases round the wall and paintings dotted all about, and instead of easel and palette and brushes, there were wigs and tresses of hair.

One long bench beneath the north light had at least twenty model heads on it, some bald and shiny, looking strangely like Lila without her turban, some with complete wigs on them, some with partly finished wigs, some with hair hanging down, some with hair brushed upwards, Edwardian fashion. Hanging from racks along the wall were tresses of hair of a great variety of sizes and shades and colours—from the fairest to the darkest, like the hair which had been fastened round the bricks last night. There were some small pots of liquid which looked like a kind of glue, and in a corner were several ovens; Rollison could not even guess their purpose.

Donny saw the question in his eyes.

"They are for dyed hair," he explained. "We subject all dyed hair to the severest tests, to try to make sure that it doesn't change under the most intemperate climatic conditions. It isn't always possible to be absolutely sure, of course." He showed some screens, not unlike the one on which Ada Jepson had her tapestry but threaded with hair, as if this was going to be the silkiest tapestry of all. "That is our matching screen," Donny explained. "We take samples of hair from the customer's head, and match it up—that is, for people who want a little extra help, or are balding, or wear a toupee."

"The question is, where do you get the hair from?"

"I buy it."

"Can you satisfy the police that you don't buy it from the men who're cutting hair off girls who want to enter for your beautiful hair competition?"

"I cannot prove where it comes from in the first place," Donny said. "Much hair, often the best for my purpose, comes from India and the Balkans, but supplies are difficult. I buy from agents in London."

"Who?"

"A small agency, run by a Mr. Samuel King," Donny said. "The police asked me all this earlier, and they know his address. I can give it to you, if you insist, but if King thinks I am accusing him, then he may cut off my supplies. Need you go and see him, too?"

It was hard to suspect Donny.

It was easy to be fooled.

"I'll check with Grice," Rollison said. "Do you handle this part of the business yourself?"

"No, my eldest son is the expert. He's a very clever chemist, and helps to prepare many of our lotions, some dyes and some rinses."

Rollison looked at the unblemished skin and the lines which might have been carved out of I wax, and the saintliness which might hide something far more secular, and asked:

"If the hair of a dozen girls was cut off each week, what would it be worth?"

Donny answered quietly:

"Possibly a hundred to a hundred and twenty pounds."

"Do you think that's why so much is being cut off?"

Donny said:

"I simply don't know, Mr. Rollison."

"Lila thinks you know why hers and Leah's was cut off."

"Lila is very young and highly strung, and she is absurdly fond of her old father," Donny I said gently.

"Or does she know that you're being high pressured?"

"She cannot know what isn't true."

Rollison said in the same tone and without any change of expression:

"Why did you hire Wallis to beat-up the barber who wouldn't sell out?"

Donny spread his hands.

"I did not intend Wallis to use force."

"Just threats of force?"

Donny didn't answer.

"I think you were compelled by someone else to put Wallis and Clay on to that barber," Rollison said. "Who's putting the pressure on you?"

"There is nothing I can tell you, Mr. Rollison."

"Someone put sharp pressure on you to prevent you from talking freely to me," insisted Rollison. "It won't work. Black is black, and white is white, and you've always been on the side of the angels. You're old enough to know that the end doesn't justify the means. You're old enough in the ways of the East End to know that if you let yourself be frightened into silence now, the pressure will get worse and worse. Who's after you, Donny?"

"I don't think we'll serve any useful purpose by continuing with this conversation," said the barber quietly, "and I have a lot of work to do. Will you excuse me?"

Rollison took one of the lists from his pocket, and said:

"Look at this."

Donny studied it, reading without glasses. His lips tightened a little, and he shot a swift glance at Rollison, then looked back at the

list. He nodded at last.

"What is it?" Rollison asked.

"The list of Wallis victims."

"Or yours?"

"Only one could be blamed onto me," said Donny, and seemed to wince.

"Do you know any of the others?"

"One of them is a wholesaler who has done a little business with me from time to time. I buy some of my supplies from him."

"Hairdressing supplies?"

"Yes, the goods I sell."

"Does he sell Jepsons' goods?"

"Most wholesalers sell some Jepson goods," Donny said. "Mr. Rollison, I'm sorry, but—"

The telephone bell rang. Donny seemed relieved and hurried to lift the receiver.

"This is Sampson," he said in his precise way. "Yes, I will come at once." He put the receiver down and said almost sadly: "Superintendent Harrison of the Division wants to see me again," he told Rollison. "I must go."

Harrison was one of the younger men, recently moved from the Yard to take over the Division. Rollison knew him more by reputation than by acquaintance. Today, he obviously did not intend to waste time with the Toff, and was almost brusque. Rollison went out, and saw a police car and two plainclothes men standing at the kerb, but no crowd was about today. The girl Lila was still at the cash desk, and there was still no friendliness in her manner. Rollison was actually outside when he turned round and went back to her.

Donny and Harrison and a sergeant had gone along the passage.

"First you, then the police," she said. "You're just bad news itself."

"Lila, try to forget that you don't like me for a minute, and put me into the picture, will you? You've six brothers and sisters in all, haven't you?"

Any law against that?"

"What kind of a family is it, Lila?"

She drew in a deep breath.

"It's the finest family in London, and I don't care what kind of families your duke and aristocratic friends have! My father is the finest man in the world, bar none. He and mother have lived the happiest life anyone possibly could. There isn't one of us kids who wouldn't die for them if it would help them, and that goes for the in-laws, too. Why don't you go away and leave us in peace?"

Rollison looked at her intently, and spoke with great deliberation.

"I'll go, Lila, and I won't come here again if you'll look at me as you are doing now, and swear that the trouble your family's in began yesterday—when I first came to see him. That's all you have to do. Swear that it's true, and I'll go."

She looked at him with her eyes brimming over with tears, and her lips quivering, but she did not speak again.

"Lila," Rollison urged, "get the family together, talk among yourselves, try to work this out the best way. I want to help Donny as

much as you do, if for different reasons. But if he keeps telling me half-truths, and if all of you close up when the police and I ask questions, he'll probably get badly hurt. Don't forget that."

She still didn't speak.

Rollison nodded and turned away, doubting whether he would ever be able to break her down.

He had moved only a step when he heard her cry out in a strangled voice, and he turned round. He saw a sight which he should have expected, and which Lila must have feared. Donny was being led out by burly Harrison.

"What's on?" Rollison asked sharply.

Harrison held a toupee up for him to see.

"This is made out of hair cut from a girl's head only two weeks ago. Hair experts are going through every wig he's got."

"Mr. Rollison," Donny said in a strained voice. "I knew nothing at all about it, but I've been charged with being in possession of stolen—stolen goods."

"You can tell that to the court," Harrison said. "Move aside, Mr. Rollison."

Rollison stood very still, and asked:

"Who's doing this to you, Donny? Who is it?" Donny said: "There's nothing I can say."

* * *

"If I knew anything I'd tell you," Lila said brokenly, tut I just don't know a thing."

* * *

Rollison went to his car and drove to Mission Street, about half a mile away. There was a corner café, patronised by dockers and labourers, and even now he could hear the throbbing heartbeat of the docks as he drew near. The owner, a man named Rickett, had been the first to suffer from Wallis's brutality. He wasn't in a big way of business, and for the most part was handy for emergency stores, such as canned and packaged foods for ships sailing earlier than expected. Night workers and the crews of ships which docked during the

night found him useful, too.

Rollison pulled up outside the shop.

Even before he stepped from the car, he saw the corner of the window, dressed much more attractively than the rest, with Jepsons' goods of many kinds—their toothpaste, hair creams, cigarettes, pens and pencils, Jepsons' writing paper, postcards, envelopes, Jepsons' brushes and their polishes for shoes and furniture.

A woman was watching Rollison from inside the shop, and he saw her dart through a doorway leading to a room at the back the moment he opened the front door. Its bell clanged noisily. The shop was small and the shelves crowded. There was much more of Jepsons' stocks here—pots and pans and gadgets, soaps and soap powders, canned foods, everything for the kitchen or the galley.

Out of sight a woman said urgently: "It's lunacy, Tom, that's what it is, sheer lunacy. Haven't you had enough?"

A man answered in a quiet voice, and spoke very slowly.

"Becky, if you're right, and this is the Toff, I'm going to see what he wants. It's true that I

"I tell you it's crazy! Look what happened when he went to see Donny! Everyone knows about it, and who can say where it will stop? They can have my hair for nothing, but they might kill you next time. Isn't it bad enough to be crippled for life?"

"I can get along," the man said, in the same deliberate voice. "You only see one side of it, Becky, you don't see the important one. What's going to happen if this doesn't stop? No one will be safe anywhere. If the Toff can do anything to stop it now, then we ought to help him."

"What kind of a chance has he got if the police couldn't do a thing?" the woman almost sobbed. "And what about *me?* You may not care whether you have another beating up, but what happens if they go for me?"

There was a moment of silence.

"If you're so nervy, Becky, you'd better go and stay with your mother for a week or two. I can manage here all right. Please don't make it more difficult than it is already."

The woman said hoarsely: "I think you're a crazy fool!"

Then the man appeared in the doorway, and at first sight Rollison thought that he was old. His hair was grey, and his eyes were tired. He was quite short, his nose was broken, and there was an ugly scar over his right eye. But the most noticeable thing was the way he walked: carrying a stick and bent a little from the waist; but he walked firmly.

He looked into Rollison's face, and smiled in a strangely contented way.

"You were right, Becky," he called to the woman behind him, "it's Mr. Rollison. Have you come about the way Wallis and his men attacked me, sir?"

Rollison found himself warming to this man as he had warmed to very few.

"Yes, Rickett," he said, and looked over the man's shoulder into the woman's eyes. She was no more than thirty-five or forty, and attractive in a gipsy way; she had thick, dark hair of which she was undoubtedly proud. "Don't worry, Mrs. Rickett, I'll spread it around that neither of you would say a word, and I'll see that you get some protection, too—protection that won't be noticeable." Here at last was a job for Ebbutt's men. "Just one thing. Have you thought of any reason at all for the beating up, Rickett?"

"Of course he hasn't!" Mrs. Rickett cried. "He told the police he didn't know why."

"The police needn't know what he's going to tell me," Rollison said.

"We're honest people and there's nothing," Mrs. Rickett shrilled. "Yes, Mr. Rollison," Rickett said, "I think I know why I was attacked." He moved round I awkwardly, and put his arm round his wife's shoulders; and she was near to tears. "I didn't tell the police because I was frightened of what might happen if I did. I wasn't absolutely sure, either. But the situation's got much worse since I was questioned. I'm not really positive now of I my facts, but I've given it a lot of thought since I came out of hospital. I think I know why it was."

For a moment he seemed to have real difficulty in making himself

go on, for his wife was crying openly, so great was her fear.

"I think that I'd been buying stolen goods from a wholesaler," Rickett said deliberately, and his grey eyes met Rollison's frankly and unafraid. "I'd been getting a little extra discount for some time, but that didn't surprise me, because Jepsons' stuff is usually sold pretty fine, and I thought they were behind it. Then I discovered, quite by chance, that one of the other dealers in the district wasn't getting the same discount from his wholesaler, and it wasn't a Jepsons' special price offer. It was the wholesaler's. I knew from experience that this particular wholesaler didn't often sell at cut price, so I asked their representative how it was that they could offer the discount when others couldn't.

"That night Wallis and the other man came," Rickett went on, steadily. "I couldn't swear who they were. They had scarves over their faces, and cloth caps pulled low down. It wasn't for over a month after I came out of hospital that I tied the two things up, Mr. Rollison. My memory wasn't too good when I first came out, but now I'm seeing things straight, and I've heard about the other people who've suffered in the same way. If anything I say to you will help to put an end to it, then you're welcome. I hope you won't have to go to the police, but —"

"No police," said Rollison quietly. Not about this. Who is the wholesaler?"

"Tom, don't tell him!" Mrs. Rickett clutched her husband's arm. "If you tell them they'll know it was you, they're bound to."

"It's Bishopps, of Penn Street," Rickett said. His wife turned away, and covered her face with her hands.

"You won't suffer for this," Rollison promised Rickett, and prayed that he could make the promise good. "The first job I'm going to do is find some other lead to Bishopps and tell the world how I got on to them. It won't bring reprisals on you."

"Oh, you can talk," the woman said drably.

"Do whatever you think is best," said Rickett. "Someone had to start this, sooner or later."

Rollison said: "Yes, someone had to." He took Rickett's hand, gripped hard, and then turned and went outside. He wasn't surprised to see two youths standing at the corner across the road. They were staring insolently, and there was little doubt that they would report where Rollison had been and how long he had stayed. He drove off, watching them in the driving mirror, and telephoned Ebbutt's gymnasium from the first telephone kiosk he saw.

"I'll make sure the Ricketts are okay, Mr. Ar," said Ebbutt, "you needn't worry at all about that. Anyfink else?"

"Not yet but soon," said Rollison, hopefully.

* * *

The second on the list of victims was a Herbert Smith, of Docksy Street. Rollison did not waste much time studying the board outside Smith's small house, or the board over the big yard next to it.

BERT SMITH
Carrier Express Delivery Service
Anywhere in London

Two small vans carrying the same wording were in the

yard and as Rollison went in, he saw a stocky man get out of one of the vans, obviously with an effort; and when the man came towards him, it was apparent that he limped. He was bigger than Rickett, a tough-looking customer, but he stopped abruptly when he saw who it was.

In a flash, he said: "Don't stay here, Mr. Rollison, I don't want any more trouble. Last time they broke my leg in three places, that was bad enough."

"One question," said Rollison. "All you have to say is yes or no. Do you handle deliveries or do any work for Bishopps of Penn Street?"

"No harm in answering that," Bert Smith said. "I've been their main delivery for fifteen years. But that's all I'm going to tell you, don't waste your time."

"That's all I wanted," Rollison said, and turned and went away.

Would the other five victims be associated with Bishopps too?

It shouldn't take long to find out.

* * *

Rollison made three more calls in the next hour, and the pattern was already clear; once one knew what the connection might be, it was obvious. One of the three had a shop, like Rickett; Rollison didn't go in there, but telephoned from a nearby kiosk and asked if the man dealt with Bishopps; and was told yes. Jepson goods were in his window, too. The second man's connection wasn't so easy to find, but his wife did most of the talking, and revealed it without realising that she did.

"We haven't the faintest idea why it happened, there wasn't any reason at all as far as I could see. My husband's led a good, honest sober life—why, he wouldn't have kept the same job for twenty-three years if he hadn't, would he?"

Rollison looked at the man; a frightened man, who undoubtedly knew more than he had told his wife.

And Rollison smiled.

"Twenty-three years with whom, Mr. Smart?"

"Why, Bishopps," his wife answered, and Smart seemed to wince.

The next man was a warehouseman from Jepsons' East End Warehouse.

The barber victim had often had Jepson goods delivered by Bishopps, too. The Blakes' only association with either firm seemed to be through their lodger, Jones.

Next there was a man named Joseph Jackson, with an address in Aldgate. Rollison pulled up round the corner from his house and walked briskly towards it, with a dozen or so other people, all hurrying home from their work. No one took any notice of him. This was a better class street than most along here, and there was none of the poverty so prevalent nearer the docks.

Jackson lived at Number 17.

It was a three-storied house, freshly painted, with clean lace curtains at the window, deep cream in colour, and with a truly magnificent aspidistra in the window, next to a huge china cat won from some fair ground. Rollison stood facing the door so that no one passing by was likely to recognise him. Foot-steps, heavy and deliberate, came immediately upon his knock at the door.

Was this another cripple?

The door began to open, very slowly; and then it moved swift as a flash, and Tiny Wallis lunged forward to grab at Rollison's wrist.

CHAPTER NINETEEN
No Chance

Rollison had a split second to jump back, and tried to; but he was too late. Wallis caught his right wrist and twisted, pain shot up his arm, and he was jolted forward. He could not save himself, and collided with Wallis, who stood like a rock. And as Rollison dropped back, Wallis kicked the door to with his foot, then struck Rollison twice, once beneath the chin, once in the stomach with such power that Rollison went dizzy.

He felt himself grabbed and dragged along the narrow, dark passage. A light came on, dazzling him. His head was muzzy and he had no control of his legs or arms, the blows had been calculated to paralyse him. With one part of his mind he realised this, and also realised that he hadn't a chance: with the other, he tried to make out where they were taking him.

Men spoke, roughly. Two of them held Rollison upright. A bright light was just above his head, and it hurt his eyes. He could see the men with strange, shimmery, blurred faces. Then he was pushed round. Beneath him there stretched a staircase, and it seemed a vast distance to the bottom, not just a flight of stairs but steps leading down into the unknown.

A man pushed, another kicked him behind the knees. He pitched downwards, thrusting out his hands against the wall to try to save himself. He failed. He felt great fear rising in him as he struck a stair with his head, but he didn't lose consciousness. He fell from step to step, each bump painful but none agonising. Then he felt himself lying on the floor without moving; at the foot of the stairs, of course. He closed his eyes for a moment. All he wanted to do was lie there; but suddenly he realised that they would come down after him, and a kind of terror caught him as he tried to scramble to his feet and look up the stairs at the same time. Wallis was walking down.

Rollison felt even more like panic.

He warned himself: "Don't lose your head, don't let him see how you feel," and that helped. He stopped scrambling and trying so desperately, his movements were calmer as he got to his feet, although he had to pull himself up with the help of a handrail. Wallis was the man who could strike terror into so many, who had broken bodies and minds, who had ruined lives. He was halfway down the stairs, stepping on each tread deliberately, as if he knew that the longer he took, the worse Rollison would feel. Rollison stood swaying. There was another door, to the right, and he could smell coal and oil, but all he could see through the doorway was a black void.

If he backed even a pace, he would turn and try to run, and Wallis would gloat.

If he could gain even a few minutes, he might have a chance to hit back. He had the automatic in his pocket and the two knives: two minutes to steady himself would help, even one. The sight of the gun might hold Wallis off, anyhow. Rollison gritted his teeth painfully because of the blow he'd received, and moved his right hand to his pocket for the gun.

It wasn't there.

Wallis thrust his great left hand forward, and the small gun rested on it like a fat grey slug.

"This what you're looking for?"

Rollison moistened his lips, but didn't speak.

"I didn't think it would take long to make you shut your trap," Wallis growled. "You've done all the talking you're going to do, to the cops or to Ebbutt or to anyone at all. You're as good as a dead man."

Rollison thought: "And he believes it."

Rollison could believe it, too.

There were still the knives, one clasped with a steel band round his right forearm, the other round his left calf; it was not the first time that those hidden weapons had stood between him and disaster. If he could shift the one on his arm so that he could grip it, one thrust would settle Wallis, and the men upstairs would not expect to see him appear, with or without a knife.

"Let me tell you something," Wallis said. "You're one of the best-known men in London. I've made quite a study of you. So've a lot of other people. There isn't anything important about you that we don't know."

He was on the bottom step now. The inches beneath him made him seem enormous, and helped him to tower over the Toff. He was still beyond striking distance, although one lunge would bring him within it. Rollison began to flex the muscles of his right arm to work the clasp down. He had done this a dozen times before, and it was almost possible to guarantee that within fifteen or twenty seconds the knife handle would rest against the palm of his hand.

He could feel it coming down; feel the wooden handle on his flesh, the cold blade also.

Wallis sneered: "You can't get away with a thing," and as he said that, there was a swift movement behind Rollison, hands gripped him, two men appeared from the dark void. One held his right arm outwards while the other pulled back the sleeve.

There was the knife.

Now get the one off his leg," Wallis said. He stared at Rollison with his eyes glittering, in his way a handsome devil.

But the key word for Wallis was powerful. A man pulled up Rollison's trouser leg, and found the knife.

"You can keep them as a souvenir," Wallis told them. "Take him in the cellar."

One man switched on a light which came from an unshaded electric bulb hanging from the ceiling of the cellar. Beneath a small coal hole, or iron grid, was a heap of coal for the fires; there were also two or three cans of petrol and paraffin, explaining the oily smell, and some wooden boxes piled on top of one another. Several of these boxes had printing on them but Rollison did not notice the word *Jepson* on any.

Along one wall was a bench with a few tools on it, including a cobbler's last and some rubbery soles and heels. On another side was a similar bench, thick with cobwebs and dust. An electric train set stood on this, the rails loosely fitted, the train itself half covered with a piece of cloth.

The two men stayed behind Rollison.

The worst thing was that he did not know what Wallis would do; every moment was an ordeal by waiting. He could see hatred in the man's eyes, could even understand it. What he could not understand was the delay: did Wallis realise that every second of delay was torture, worse in some ways than an attack itself ?

At least Rollison was standing on his own two feet, and no longer swaying. The light shining upon Wallis's face cast shadows which made the man look horrific. That might be intended to add to the menace, but in a queer way it struck Rollison as funny; the overloading of a situation, so that the sinister could become almost ludicrous. It was not so marked as that, but it eased Rollison's tension slightly. If Wallis had intended to attack as he had attacked so many others would he have waited? None of the stories of what had happened suggested that he would.

Why the delay?

"You've seen some friends of mine," Wallis said, with sardonic humour. "Any of them talk?"

"None of them talked," Rollison answered. "Some of them talked," said Wallis. "I was just asking a rhetorical question. Rickett talk?" Rhetorical was a good word for Wallis. "Nobody talked," Rollison insisted.

"They name me?"

"I named you, and they wouldn't confirm or deny it. That was good enough for me, but it wouldn't be any good in court."

"No one's ever going to get me into court," Wallis said. "You're lying. Rickett talked. Rickett told you about Bishopps. You want to know how I found that out? I talked to Bert Smith. The only question you asked was whether he did any work for Bishopps. Think that was smart, Rollison? Because I don't. It proves to me how much wind you are. If you'd been smart you'd have asked a dozen questions."

Rollison saw the magnitude of that mistake, and prayed that Ebbutt had sent help to Rickett quickly. He had been too keyed up, too viciously angry about what had been done to Jolly, and emotion had overcome logic.

"All right," he said, "it wasn't smart."

"You aren't so good at anything," Wallis sneered. "How much do you know about Bishopps?"

"All I know is that everyone except Jones and the Blakes had some association with them," Rollison said.

"What else?"

"What else is there?"

"There is another thing," Wallis said heavily.

"You may as well talk."

Rollison said abruptly: "There's no other thing, Wallis, and I've talked enough."

Wallis could have struck at him then, and actually fondled the knuckle duster on his right fist, but he did not strike. The cellar was quiet but for the breathing of the four men, although there were sounds from outside: not loud, all muffled but unmistakable. There were people walking, and now and again an extra clang on the iron cover of the coal hole told of someone who actually stepped on to it.

Now and again, also a car horn sounded in a strangely subdued note. There was no sound of voices, but the little noise that did come through made Rollison wonder what would happen if he shouted.

They would only let him shout once.

Wallis did not attempt to strike him, and now one thing was clear; he was after information. He would count on the unspoken threat, the fondling of that brass weapon, the presence of the two men behind, to break down Rollison's resistance and refusal to answer questions.

It was clear now that he was no kind of fool, and could think for himself; but it wasn't yet clear what information he wanted.

He said: "Rollison, I don't have to tell you what I can do for you, and I don't have to tell you I don't like your face. I'd prefer to see it looking different. Just now I told you I don't intend to let you go, and that still goes with me. But a lot of things can happen between now and the time you die, and that's up to you."

It would make no difference, Rollison knew.

"You wanted to know one thing when you came to my place," Wallis went on. "You wanted to know who was backing me on these jobs. That right?"

It's right," Rollison agreed.

"You found out yet?" Wallis demanded.

* * *

If the Toff said "no' and so told the truth, he wouldn't have any kind of chance, and this would soon be over.

If he said 'yes', Wallis would want him to prove it, and would want him alive so that he could talk.

And he could prove nothing.

* * *

Rollison said: "I haven't got any further than Bishopps, and I don't know much about the firm. They're big wholesalers who supply a lot of goods to smaller sea-going vessels which are fitted out and provisioned from the docks. That's as far as I've got."

"Rollison," Wallis said, raising both hands and nursing the knuckle duster, "you've got to think again. You know what happens when I get mad. Don't get anything wrong: the way you talk will make the difference between dying the hard way or the easy way. You've been seeing Ada Jepson."

"We're old friends."

"She went to see the man Jones, and she refurnished that house of the Blakes."

"There isn't much wrong with Ada," Rollison said.

Then Wallis grinned.

It was only the slightest of grins, and vanished almost at once, as if Wallis knew that it was the wrong moment to show that he was amused. But what caused the grin? The simple statement that there wasn't much wrong with Ada?

Why had she gone to such trouble to recoup the Blakes? Had it been conscience money?

Wallis said more savagely: "Okay, let's get on with it. Why've you been seeing her?" When Rollison didn't answer, he motioned to the men. Rollison felt his arms gripped from behind, so that he couldn't

move and couldn't strike out. Wallis drew nearer, all his brutality naked in his face.

"Come on, let's have it. Why've you been seeing her? She under suspicion?"

Rollison managed to say: "You must be crazy."

"We'll see if I'm crazy," Wallis said. He thrust his left hand out, the fingers crooked, and clutched Rollison's neck with such force that he almost cut off his breathing, and actually made him choke. "You think she's my sponsor?"

"She can't be," Rollison exclaimed. "She can't—" he broke off again as that hand clutched more tightly, and while the men behind him gripped his arms with fingers like steel bands. "I've told you all I know."

"Okay, Mr. Ruddy Toff, we'll see if we can't loosen your tongue a bit more."

Wallis let Rollison go, and again he stood swaying and helpless. The next few minutes would be the worst.

Then he heard creaking noises somewhere above his head, and a clatter of footsteps, enough to make Wallis turn round to see what was happening.

A woman stumbled into the cellar.

"It's the cops," she gasped. "They're at the front door, three of them. I see them come."

CHAPTER TWENTY
The Cops

Rollison could only just see her, over Wallis's shoulder, but the shrill note of fear in her voice told Rollison that this was true. He felt a quiver run through the arm of the man on his right, and the grip slackened; the other man's grip tightened.

One moment, there had been dreadful danger.

Now there could be safety, or there could be death.

". . . I see them come," seemed to echo about the cellar.

Then there came a different sound, of hammering on a door above.

Wallis and the others seemed paralysed.

Rollison snatched his right arm free from one man and swung round to strike the other as the second man's grip slackened and fell away. But out of the corner of his eye Rollison saw the blade of his own knife glint as it was driven towards him.

Then Wallis swung round.

"Don't do that!" he roared, and leapt at the man with the knife. Rollison felt the prick of the needle point, then a slight scratch as Wallis pushed his man's arm downwards. Then Wallis struck at him, caught him on the side of the head, and sent him staggering. The other man, still behind Rollison, tripped him up.

The hammering on the door was still loud, the woman looked frightened out of her wits.

A crash above them shook the ceiling.

The woman gasped: "They've smashed the door down."

Rollison kept very still, watching Wallis and the others, who had knives and guns and who could still kill; judging from their expressions wanted to. But footsteps were now loud above their heads, and a man said:

"Here's the cellar. *Rollison!* You there?"

"There are three armed men down here!" Rollison cried.

Wallis had his left hand in his pocket, undoubtedly holding the gun. Would hatred conquer reason? Any crime committed now would be the easiest thing to prove.

He took the gun out and tossed it at Rollison, and it struck sparks off the cement floor.

"Drop those knives," he ordered his men, and slapped the woman roughly on the bottom. "Shut your trap. We've got every right to be here, they can't pin anything onto us." He shot a sneering sideways glance at Rollison. "It's only his word against ours, one against the four of us, and we didn't bring him here, he came of his own accord. So shut your trap."

Then two Divisional men came in sight, one carrying a policeman's truncheon, the other unarmed.

In a moment, handcuffs clicked.

* * *

Rollison felt as if he had been through an earthquake; but there was a kind of exhilaration about the feeling. He didn't yet know what had brought the police, but he I would soon, because he was

on his way to see

Grice. He had made a statement to the Divisional men, and kept it factual: Wallis and the others were on the way to the Divisional police station and the cells.

Rollison was driving through the nearly deserted city. It was a little after half past six, and the main crowds had gone, but he noticed nothing except the traffic ahead. He had been close to death and closer to maiming, and the exhilaration was due to the simple fact that he was alive.

So was Jolly; Grice had told him so by telephone at Divisional H.Q.

So was Rickett: Ebbutt's men had covered Rickett's shop.

Rollison thought over everything that had happened, trying to assess its significance, to see anything he had missed. He wasn't finding it easy. Wallis had almost certainly been trying to mislead him with the talk about Ada. Had that quick smile been deliberate?

Ada?

It was impossible!

Wasn't it?

If not Ada, then Reggie.

Where was Reggie Jepson? How true was the story that he had gone to Ibiza?

What was it all about?

There were other questions, some of little importance and some vital; perhaps the most vital was to decide how much to tell the police.

Rollison drove past St. Paul's without glancing up at it, turned down towards Blackfriars Bridge, then right along the Embankment; and every light was green for him. Good omen? He put his foot down, and exceeded the thirty mile limit by at least fifteen; the road was almost empty. He saw the traffic lights at Horseguards Avenue turn red, and slowed down; this would break the succession of greens. He shrugged, then saw something else: a sky-blue T-Model Ford which was drawn up on the side of the road a little way past the traffic lights. It was Ebbutt's antique.

Ebbutt was standing by the side of the car and peering anxiously towards the cars drawn up by the lights. Rollison pulled over, and stopped just in front of the Model-T. Ebbutt's face lit up, and he came striding forward, massive and powerful, his great paunch steady.

"Hallo, Bill."

"Thank Gawd I found you," Ebbutt said. "Thought you was bahnd to come this way if you was going to see old Gricey. Proper sense of 'tuition, I 'ave. That true they've picked up Wallis?"

"Yes."

"You laid a charge?" Ebbutt demanded.

"No. The police have charged him with uttering threats and menaces. I haven't weighed in yet."

"Mr. Ar," said Ebbutt, earnestly, "I don't want to interfere no more'n I must, and you know how much I want to see the perisher in clink. If I "ad my way I'd see 'im strung up. But I've been thinking a lot abaht this job, and I know Wallis. You've got to admit 'e's tough. Even if me and a dozen of the boys set on 'im, I dunno if 'e'd talk. I'm

darn sure that he won't talk to the police. The important thing is to find aht who's behind him, Mr. Ar, you agree about that?"

Rollison studied the ugly, earnest features, and the narrowed almost pleading eyes; seeing behind them the smooth Thames bright in the evening sunlight. Not far away was the outline of the buildings of Scotland Yard.

"You do agree, doncher?" Ebbutt insisted. "Go on, Bill," said Rollison.

"Well, there's a lot to be said for putting Wallis away, and if you could be sure 'e'd stay away for a few years that'd be okay. But can you? The buzz has gone rahnd that you attacked 'im."

"If the police haven't anything else against him, they can't make this one stick," Rollison agreed.

"That's wot's going the rahnds," said Ebbutt, and it made the Toff marvel that news could spread so quickly throughout the East End. "Well, wot I say is, if you managed to get 'im sent down for a few weeks, that's the most that would 'appen, and when he come out he'd be worse than ever. What I think is that we don't want to take any chances, we want to put 'im away for good. And you've got to find aht who's behind him, because there are a lot of ovver brutes nearly as bad as Wallis."

"The Divisional police wouldn't tell me much, but Grice will," said Rollison. "I'll soon know if they've anything else to use against Wallis. If they haven't, we won't have any say in it: he'll be freed. They might have him up before the court if I lay a charge, they might even get an eight-day remand, but that's the most. Grice might want to get that, too; he could dig a lot in eight days."

"And anyone who squealed while Wallis was on remand would wish they'd been born dumb," Ebbutt said, putting a great hand on Rollison's arm. "I don't want to persuade you, Mr. Ar, but now this thing's gone so far, it would be better to try and get right to the bottom of it. Wallis won't grass, you know that, but he might not feel so good now he's on the run, and might lead you where you want to go. That's the way I see it."

Rollison said slowly: "You could be right, Bill. Anything else new?"

"No."

"Any word gone round that Bishopps of Penn Street are concerned in this?"

Ebbutt looked astonished. "No, Mr. Ar, not a whisper. You sure abaht that?" He didn't wait for an answer, but went on thoughtfully: "They're big people, Bishopps are, biggest wholesalers anywhere near, got a very big business. But you know about Bishopps, don't you?"

"Tell me, Bill."

"Dunno' that I'm exactly a business man," Ebbutt said, shrugging those great shoulders, "but I get arhand, and I keep my ears to the ground. Old Bishopp's been retired over a year, now, 'is son's still officially the boss, but Bishopps belongs to Jepsons. They bought it—that's if rumour's right, Mr. Ar."

* * *

Rollison spoke quietly into the telephone in the kiosk.

"Ada, answer me one question."

"I don't see what good more talking will do," said Ada.

"I'd like to know why you've cooled off the inquiry," said Rollison, and went on abruptly:

"Have Jepsons bought a controlling interest in Bishopps of Penn Street?"

Jepsons haven't. Reggie and I bought it under a nominee company."

"Are you on that company's board?"

"No," said Ada.

"Why so shy?"

"If it suits our business to keep our deals quiet for as long as we can, that's up to us," Ada said.

"Just business reasons," Rollison said.

"Yes."

"Any word from Reggie?"

"No," Ada said, and rang off.

* * *

Rollison saw the old T-Model Ford chugging its way along the embankment towards Westminster Bridge, as he went up the steps of the Yard. The sergeant on duty was expecting him, and waved him towards the lift. Rollison nodded his thanks, and went on. Few people were about this evening, it was a kind of no man's hour at the Yard. He was taken up by the liftman who looked tired already, and walked on his own to Grice's office. He still hadn't made up his mind how much to tell Grice, and couldn't be sure what tactics would pay off best. Ebbutt was seriously worried, and that meant that there was good reason for anxiety.

Rollison tapped.

"Come in." Grice was standing behind his desk. "You're the nearest thing to a ghost I'll ever set eyes on. Sit down." As Rollison took an armchair that was already in position, Grice studied him carefully. "Well, you don't look as if you've got one foot out of the grave!"

Rollison had never felt more wary. This was an overtone of friendliness, too sugary to be genuine. Grice wanted something: so away with recriminations, away with taunts of folly, away with the line that but for the police he, Rollison, would probably be dead.

"Half a foot," Rollison mumbled. "Thanks to you and all policemen. I've never been so glad to hear the word "cops". How did you do it?" Grice pushed cigarettes across the desk, and said expansively:

"We'd virtually asked you to have a crack at this, and it was our fault that you did. Partly ours, anyhow. When we discovered that it was going to be really ugly, we decided that we ought to keep an eye on you. The attack on Jolly was the deciding factor." Grice leaned back, pressing the tips of his fingers together, positively airy in manner. "We had each of the Wallis victims watched. When Wallis was seen going into Jackson's house half an hour before you arrived, we laid on reinforcements. We had to have some kind of a schedule knowing that you might find a way of getting out and bringing a lot of information with you, so we gave you half an hour. Then we raided."

"If I had a whisky and soda," said Rollison, "I would lift my glass

to the C.I.D."

Grice bent down and produced a bottle of whisky and two glasses; he was virtually a teetotaller, and now poured whisky and soda for Rollison, and plain soda water with a splash for himself.

"Health," he said.

"To all policemen," said Rollison, and drank deeply. "I'm glad you didn't allow me thirty-one minutes. Thanks."

"Get anything out of Wallis?"

"The questions were the other way about," Rollison said. "Let me come clean, Bill. Wallis to imply that Ada Jepson was somehow involved. I don't know whether it was all a big bluff, even to the threat to kill me, whether it was staged to plant the suspicion about Ada, or whether it was genuine. Have you anything new about the Jepsons?"

Grice was watching him levelly, and didn't reply at once; when he did, he shuffled some documents off his desk, as if to refresh his memory, and then said abruptly:

"I've some negative news. Reginald Jepson did not go to Ibiza. I've checked with the Spanish consulate, and he didn't get a visa. But he could have gone to any country in Europe where there's no visa required. Any reason to think his sister lied about him?"

"No reason, just a hunch. Why should she have lied?"

"I don't know," Grice said. "I do know that I've got a call out for Reggie Jepson."

"I'd like to know more about Reggie, too," murmured Rollison. "What charge have you got against Wallis?"

"None, unless you lay one," Grice was emphatic. "His statement says that he went to see Jackson, an old acquaintance, and was there when you came. He says that he opened the door for Jackson, and that you immediately threatened him with a gun—the gun which the Divisional people found on the floor of the cellar. He says that he knocked the gun out of your hand, then put you down in the cellar to cool off. He was trying to find out why you'd pulled the gun when we arrived. As a story it's hard to break. Wallis has a genius for the alibi or the phoney defence. I don't think it would be wise to charge him, because I can't see the magistrate giving even an eight-day remand in custody."

Rollison felt edgy, but said briskly enough: "No charge, then. Can you hold him overnight?"

"Yes."

"It'll give us a little time to work in. Did you I know that Jepsons now virtually controlled Bishopps?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that at least one of the men attacked by Wallis questioned Bishopps' salesman about goods being sold at special discount?"

Grice said sharply: "No, I didn't. Who—well, never mind who. You positive?"

"As sure as I can be," said Rollison. "And add the others together, Bill. One was a carrier who handled these goods, another worked for Bishopps, two bought from the wholesaler. Supposing each knew that he was dealing in stolen goods, and was going to talk when Wallis

paid his visit."

Grice was making notes swiftly.

"It's a new angle. It could be robbery from Jepsons on a big scale, with Bishopps as the distributors of the goods. Then if a Jepson nominee company bought Bishopps and found out—"

"Bill," said Rollison, "there's a curious parallel here. Jepsons, always big and getting bigger, buying up all the opposition they can. And Donny Sampson, a big landowner, once small but getting much bigger and buying up all the opposition he can. Has Donny been charged?"

"Yes," Grice said. "With being in possession of human hair, knowing it to have been stolen."

"Think you'll ever prove that against him?" Rollison asked.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE
Invitation

"I think we can prove it," Grice answered. "One or two of his staff say he knew the hair was stolen. But if you ask me if it makes sense, that's a different matter. Apart from anything else, there's the obvious objection that Donny wouldn't deal in his own daughter's hair."

"Think he's being framed?" Rollison asked brusquely.

"It wouldn't surprise me."

"And blackmailed into saying nothing?"

"Could be."

"Either Donny's a victim or he's a cleverer crook than we want to think," Rollison said abruptly. "If he's a victim, he's scared of saying so, and Wallis is an expert at scaring people. Ada Jepson won't tell me what she knows, either. I fancy she's scared, and she takes a lot of scaring."

"Think her trouble is Wallis or someone else?" asked Grice. "Or just the fear of being found out?"

"That's the million dollar question," said Rollison. He put his hands on the arms of his chair, and sprang up. "Bill, you're a genius. You've given me the glimmering of a new idea. Like to hear it in confidence?"

"Yes."

"And no reminder that you're a policeman," marvelled Rollison, sitting on the corner of the big desk. "Wallis is the key. Wallis takes orders and payment and hands out punishment. You can hold him overnight, and he needn't be in dock until eleven in the morning. We suspect that Donny Sampson and Ada Jepson are being forced to take what's coming to them. We think they know who's behind Wallis, and what it's all about, but dare not disclose the name. Right?"

"Right."

"Let's bring them together," suggested Rollison softly. "Let's invite Ada to Wallis's place, and Donny as well. Let them receive a message supposed to be from Wallis, to go to the house in Dirk Street. If they're really under his thumb, they'll go."

"What good will it do?"

"When they get there, let's try to force a showdown while Wallis is still in the cooler. Was Mick Clay picked up this afternoon?"

"Yes. He had some jewellery in his pockets which might have been hot, so they held him."

"So he's out of the way, as well. If Ada and Donny jump to an order from Wallis, there'll be one big happy family at Wallis's house, a kind of welcome-home party. Right?"

"What you really mean is that you want to set them at each other's throats," Grice said.

"That's it."

"I don't see that it would do any harm," Grice conceded. "We're holding Wallis, we can get a search warrant for his place now."

"Oh, no, William," said Rollison, briskly. "The police must keep right out of this. I'll get inside while it's dark, rig up a tape recorder, and have it running while the talk goes on. I'll be there myself to prod

them into talking."

"You're asking for too much trouble," Grice objected. "The house will be watched, and everything that happens will be reported to Wallis before he gets home. He'll know you're there. If you've forced your way in and planted a tape recorder, he would have every excuse to smash you to pulp. We can't give you authority to break into a man's house even if we know the man is a dangerous criminal. You'll have no protection, and Wallis might not wait like he did tonight."

"You've pointed out the one reason why the police can't be in on this," argued Rollison earnestly. "That way, Wallis would have plenty of warning. The police mustn't be within a mile of the place, but we might lay on one or two of Ebbutt's men in case I need help again, but this time I shouldn't. This afternoon I walked into it with my eyes shut, tomorrow morning they'll be very wide open."

Grice said slowly: "I suppose if you're set on it, I can't stop you. But now we've got the Bishopps and Jepsons angle—"

"Donny and Ada won't talk," Rollison reminded him. "One of them must be made to. They will certainly talk to Wallis. All I'm saying is that we've got to get them talking, and make a record."

"You're sticking your neck right out," Grice said, and added craftily. "Think that's what Jolly would like?"

"You might not believe it but I'm thinking more about Tom Rickett," Rollison said with steely quiet. "Tom and his wife and the dozens of others who might suffer. Donny Sampson's daughters. Ada Jepson, too."

"All right," said Grice in a clipped voice. "Anything else you plan to do?"

"I think I'll take an hour or two off," said Rollison. "Will you lay on the tape recorder? Make it one I can fix easily, I'm no mechanic."

"You'd better get Ebbutt onto that, he's got a good radio man."

So Grice knew more than he often pretended.

"I will," said Rollison. "May I see Wallis when you charge him?"

* * *

Wallis flatly denied the charge of uttering threats and menaces, and there was cold hatred in the way he looked at Rollison. When they were outside the cell, Grice said with absolute conviction:

"If he ever gets at you again, he'll kill you."

* * *

Rollison reached Gresham Terrace a little after eight-thirty. Two of Ebbutt's men were there, both professional boxers. Ebbutt had supplied them with beer and sandwiches and they were playing with great intentness. Rollison telephoned Ebbutt, laid on the tape recorder, and asked in a voice which the two men couldn't hear:

"Think you could find me one or two little bits of hot jewellery, Bill? Something I could plant so that a chap we know would have a job to explain them away?"

"I'll 'ave a damn' good try!"

"Thanks," said Rollison. Now I'm going to send your two chaps home, I don't need a night shift."

"Please yourself," Ebbutt said.

The pair went off as soon as their game was over, each richer by five pounds.

Rollison raided the larder, found ham on the bone, bread and cheese, felt the need for a good hot meal, and told himself that he could worry about that when this was over. He telephoned the hospital again; there was no change in Jolly's condition, which meant that he had a better chance than ever.

At half past nine, Rollison left the flat again. A Yard man was on duty outside, but no one else was in sight. No one followed him. He did not go by car, but first on foot, then on a bus, finally in a taxi to Middleton Road, near Sloane Square. He made quite sure that no one was watching him, then went briskly along the ill-lit street towards Number 24. There was a light on in the fanlight. He pressed the bell, then looked about him, surprised that Mrs. Blake opened the door; the light behind her in the kitchen seemed wispy. A Yard man came hurrying down the stairs, saying:

"You shouldn't do that, I told you I would open the door to any callers, Mrs. Blake. Who—oh, it's you sir."

Mrs. Blake said: "Dear me, I quite forgot, I was watching the television. Do you want me, or—?"

"Just a word with Mr. Jones," said Rollison. "That's all right, then I'll go back. I'll soon be able to pick up the threads again." Mrs. Blake bustled off, and the Yard man grinned.

"She's tougher than she looks. I was just playing a game of draughts with Jones."

"How is he?"

"He'll be up and about tomorrow."

"Miss Jepson been again?"

"No, but she sent about twenty books, and some crystallised fruits. She can't do enough for him."

"So it seems," agreed Rollison. "Mind if I go and have a word with him?"

"Glad if you do, sir. As a matter of fact I wouldn't mind stretching my legs outside for ten minutes, I was told that would be okay provided Jones and the house weren't left unguarded. Ten minutes be long enough?"

"Fifteen."

"Just time for a pint at the corner," the Yard man said, and grinned. "See you later, sir."

Rollison watched him go out, then listened to the drone of voices on the television, sounding clear although the kitchen door was closed. He went quietly upstairs, reminding himself again that he now knew pretty well why the other victims had been attacked, but didn't know the secret of James Matthison Jones.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO
Burglary

Jimmy Jones was certainly looking much better. He sat up on his pillows, smoking a cigarette, and by the side of the bed was the draughts board; obviously the Yard man was winning. A small radio in the corner was on, and swing music came softly into the room. Jones's eyes were clearer, although the bandages looked as heavy as when Rollison had seen him before.

"Oh, hallo, Mr. Rollison!" He seemed genuinely glad to see his visitor. "Nice of you to look in. Take a pew." He pointed to another chair, then put his head on one side, and went on in a different tone: "But I should hardly think you're just sick visiting."

"Right in one," Rollison said. "How's your memory?" He sat down and took out cigarettes. "Pretty good, I think," said Jones.

"You told me and the police that you hadn't the faintest idea why you were attacked," Rollison said.

"And I haven't."

"Misplaced loyalty can be a deadly thing," Rollison remarked, and lit a cigarette.

"Talking in riddles can be a damned silly one," said Jones. "I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about. Misplaced loyalty to whom?"

"Jepsons."

Jones shook his head, leaned over and stubbed out his cigarette, and said:

"I still haven't the faintest idea what you're driving at."

"I'm beginning to believe you," Rollison said slowly. Will you try to get at it this way? Among the people who have been attacked are . . ." he told Jones of each one, watching the man all the time, and seeing the dawning of understanding come. Jones looked both astonished and bewildered. He waited for Rollison to finish, and then said ruefully:

"I can see what you're getting at now, and probably what it was all about. I'd been checking Bishopps' accounts. They weren't buying anything like so much from us as they used to, and I couldn't understand why. Then I went out to see their manager, and found the place stacked out with our products. The manager said he'd overstocked badly, and that seemed reasonable. But if that was really stolen stuff, and he thought I was on the trail—good lord!"

"When did you go to Bishopps?"

"A week before this happened." Jones drew in a deep breath. "I give you my word, this is the first time I've connected the two things!"

"And I'll take your word," said Rollison readily. "Did you report this to anyone else?"

"Mr. Jepson, of course."

"Did you see him personally?"

"Yes."

"What was his reaction?"

"He told me to keep it to myself, and said he'd have secret inquiries made," said Jones. "How did he seem?"

"He looked pretty tired, and it didn't surprise me to hear that he was going off for a week or two."

"Did you notice anything else about him? Did he seem worried?"

"No. Just tired."

"Did he tell you that Jepson had acquired Bishopps through a nominee company?"

"Oh, that old rumour! It's been going the rounds for a long time, but it's never come to anything. One or two big shareholders have wanted to buy Bishopps, but that's all. The Jepsons have control with about sixty per cent of the shares."

"It isn't a rumour, Bishopps is now owned by Jepsons," Rollison declared.

James Matthison Jones looked bewildered.

"Well, if they own both places, the stuff at Bishopps could hardly have been stolen could it? What the devil's going on, Rollison?"

"That's exactly what we have to find out," Rollison said very slowly.

* * *

Gresham Terrace was watched still by a Yard man, but the flat was empty. Rollison went straight to his bedroom and took an old suit from the wardrobe; one which looked as if he had slept in it, and which would have been third best even for a man at the docks. He put this on; and there was a smell of coal dust about it, also a smell of oil. He rubbed his hands over his face, without making it look too dirty, tied a choker round his neck and pulled on an old cloth cap, with a ragged peak. Next, he put on a pair of rubber-soled shoes which were solid enough but had seen better days.

He clipped on the knives, put another gun into his pocket, a gas pistol like the one he had first used against Wallis.

He had a queer feeling about Wallis; it was almost as if the man was watching him, although he was in jail, and as though one of the hooligans who would so readily do what he asked was outside.

He waited until there was a knock at the front door, went across, opened the door a fraction, and said:

"Who is it?"

"There's a packet here from Radio and Recording Supplies, sir."

"Put it down and leave it, will you?"

"Very good, sir."

Rollison waited until the man's footsteps had gone, then opened the door cautiously: Wallis might have powerful friends ready to attack. The landing was empty. The packet, neatly wrapped up in brown paper, looked innocent enough. Rollison took it into the big room, and undid it cautiously. Inside was a small tape recorder, worked from a battery, extremely sensitive and with enough tape to record for nearly an hour.

And it would go into his pocket.

"Thanks, Bill," said Rollison.

He went out the back way, and was quite sure that no one who saw him knew who he was.

He walked to the nearest Tube station and went to Charing Cross, changed there for the train to Whitechapel. It was a little after eleven o'clock when he arrived, and only a dozen people got off at the

station. No one looked at him twice. He walked with a kind of swagger, as if he'd had more than enough to drink and stared down at the ground all the time. Outside, he turned first towards the Blue Dog, passing the gymnasium, where lights were still on.

He headed for Dirk Street and the docks.

No ships were being worked nearby, all the dockside noises came from some distance off; that was a pity. He walked along Dirk Street, and saw lights at several of the houses, including Wallis's. He went to the back of the house, using a narrow alley, found out which was the rear entrance, and made himself familiar with the little back yard. Then he went back towards the gymnasium, but did not go too close to the lights.

"Want anyfink?" a man asked.

"Ebbutt arahnd?"

"He's too busy to touch tonight, mate."

"I got information to sell."

"Wot abaht?"

"Rollison."

The name worked like a charm. The man hurried into the gymnasium, and Ebbutt soon came out. He approached Rollison, wheezing in the chilly night air, and as he drew near he flashed a torch into Rollison's face.

Wot the hell—" he began, and then caught his breath.

"Easy, Bill," Rollison whispered. "I want a kip for the night, somewhere I can get away from early in the morning. Can I have a camp bed in the gym?"

"It's all yours, Mr. Ar."

"Forget the Mr. Ar. Anyone else sleeping there tonight?"

"No."

"Fine. Any news for me?"

"There are a couple of blokes at Wallis's place, Wallis ain't taking no more chances with his wife."

"We can't blame him, can we?" Rollison said, and forced a grin, but he did not feel like smiling. "Let me have the gym key, Bill, will you? And any luck with those sparklers?"

"Yeah, to both," said Ebbutt. "Wouldn't like to tell me wot you're up to, would you?"

"No," Rollison said. He took the key and a small packet which Ebbutt gave him, gripped the huge forearm, said: "Thanks," and moved off. He reached a telephone kiosk in the Mile End Road, dialled Grice's home number, and wasn't surprised to be answered promptly: Grice wasn't an early-to-bed enthusiast.

"Rollison," Rollison said.

"Oh, it's you. Changed your mind?"

"No. Two of Wallis's friends are on guard at his house tonight. Could you arrange for the Division to send a couple of men to pick them up about four o'clock say?"

Grice hesitated, and then said gruffly: "This is the first time in my life I've ever seriously thought of compounding a felony. I'll try to fix it. But don't make any mistake, if you get caught, I can't help you. I'll say that I know absolutely nothing about it."

"All you have to do is your duty," said Rollison solemnly.

"Thanks, Bill."

He went back to the gymnasium, where most of the lights were out, and a camp bed was made up, and a bottle of whisky, soda water, ham sandwiches and some cheese and biscuits were on a table nearby. He ate heartily amid the smell of sawdust and canvas, and then looked at three small diamond rings and two brooches which were in the packet Ebbutt had given him. He put them carefully in his pocket, and at one o'clock, got into bed, taking off his shoes and loosening his choker.

He was asleep within five minutes, and awake at half past three, as if an alarm clock worked inside him.

He went into the chilly morning air, and shivered, but his spirits rose when he saw dark clouds obscuring the stars; the street lighting was very poor. He went a long way round to Dirk Street, and just as the daylight was coming, stepped into the back yard.

A police car approached a few minutes afterwards; and turned into Dirk Street. No one would be surprised and probably a lot of hearts were beating uncomfortably then: but it was not until the stroke of five thirty that Rollison heard a heavy knocking at the front of the house. After a moment, lights went on upstairs; then one went on in the kitchen, where a man had been sitting in an armchair. He saw the man go slowly towards the front of the house, and a moment after through an open doorway, saw another man join him in the narrow passage.

The banging came again, and Rollison fancied that he heard a man calling the formula: "Open in the name of the law."

Rollison used the key he had taken on his first visit, slipped inside, closed the door and stepped straight to the larder, where Stella Wallis had been imprisoned. He left the door ajar. Men were talking and arguing, Stella's voice sounded shrill and angry, and then one of the men raised his voice:

"You can't do this to us, I'll see my lawyer!"

"You see him at the station," a policeman said. "Don't make a fuss. You're only wanted for questioning."

Stella said viciously: "One of these days I'll tell you what I think of you, you slab-faced piece of bacon. There's nothing in this house that shouldn't be, and there never has been. My friends are a damn' sight more honest than any cops."

"Listen, Stella," one of Wallis's men said, "go and ask Ropey to come along. He'll be okay, and—"

"Oh, it's not worth worrying about now it's light," Stella said, and stifled a yawn. "It's okay, Tiny won't blame you because the rozzers picked you up."

Confused sounds followed, next the slamming of the front door, then the sound of a car engine; and as it hummed, Stella Wallis came walking from the hall. If she came to the kitchen to make tea, she would almost certainly open the larder door.

Rollison waited tensely.

She went upstairs.

* * *

Some minutes afterwards, Rollison went into the living room and sat in an armchair. He did not put on a light but waited until sufficient

daylight came through the window for him to look about him. He had to take a chance that when Ada and Donny came they would be shown into the front room; he put the tape recorder there, all set and ready; it would start when he pressed a lighting point in the wainscotting. The recorder itself was on top of a corner cupboard which held several pieces of Dresden china. No one could see it casually, and this wasn't a morning when Stella Wallis would start spring cleaning. Then he put the rings and brooches behind the books in the smaller room.

He went out the back way, hurried to Gresham Terrace, bathed, changed, and cooked bacon and eggs; Jolly was in his mind a great deal. He telephoned the hospital and was told that Jolly had had a good night.

At ten o'clock, when Wallis was being taken into court, Rollison reached Dirk Street again, this time sitting in a car at one end of the street. At ten fifteen Donny arrived, alone. At ten twenty, Ada arrived, driving her own M.G. Nothing else happened that was at all unusual in Dirk Street, until a little after half past ten, when one or two youths drifted in, and hovered about Wallis's house. Others sauntered up in twos and threes. If they noticed Rollison, they did not show it. They gathered about Wallis's place, obviously a reception party. Rollison recognised several of them; at least six had been with the mob when he had nearly been crushed by the lorry.

At a quarter to eleven, a taxi turned the corner, and the youths began to cheer as if they were welcoming a film star; and as they did so, six of them moved swiftly away from the main party and surrounded Rollison's car. He did not move.

One of them opened the door.

"Come on out, come and give a cheer for Tiny," one of the youths sneered. "Come and tell him you're sorry for what you did to him."

Outside his house, Wallis towered above the youths, and looked across at Rollison's car. Then he beckoned; and went into the house.

"We told you—" one of the youths said roughly, yet he didn't touch Rollison.

"Yes, I'll have a word with Tiny," Rollison said, and got out. "I'd like to find out how he fooled the beak." He shouldered one of the youths aside, and went straight towards the house. When he reached it, Wallis was standing in the hall and staring into the front room.

Rollison heard him say:

"What the hell are you doing here?"

It was his wife who said, gasping: "They said you'd sent for them!"

Rollison called from the front door: "No, Stella, I did. I thought it time we all had a little chat."

He went in.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE
The Power Behind Wallis

Behind Rollison, crowding the street and the porch, were the youths on whom Wallis depended. In front was Wallis himself, so huge and powerful, and with his eyes glittering—not only furious, but puzzled; like a bewildered bull. His wife was puzzled, too, and neither liked nor understood what was happening. Into the doorway of the front room came Ada Jepson looking tiny and quite adorable, her eyes bright as if touched by a kind of fear.

Then Donny appeared.

And all of these people stared at Rollison.

"So they let you come away, did they," said Rollison, as if that was the last thing he had expected. There was an edge to his voice: it would be easy for them to believe that he was acutely disappointed. "I thought you were certain—"

The puzzled look and the fury died from Wallis's eyes, and he grinned with a kind of savage triumph.

"So you thought they'd remand me for eight days and you could go on playing your little game," he said in a rough voice. The words carried to the gang outside, and won a ragged cheer. "It isn't the first time you've got things wrong with me, Mr. Bloody Toff, but it'll be the last."

Rollison glanced quickly over his shoulder, as if he was suddenly scared. He dodged into the front room, as if to get away from the door—and bumped against the switch controlling the recorder.

Wallis grabbed his shoulder, and drew him back into the hall.

The youths hooted with laughter.

"Don't you try any rough stuff," Rollison said, and no one could doubt the note of fear in his voice. "The police know I'm here."

"Hear that, boys?" Wallis roared, and his voice reverberated through the narrow hall. "The police know he's here. Tell that to your wives and children, the so-called So-and-so Hero Toff is so scared he wants police protection! The police pulled him out of trouble last night, too. How about that for a caveman hero?"

The youths roared.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Wallis bellowed. "I'll send him out for you to look after, be careful with him, he might get hurt." There was a lilt of savage gloating in his voice. "Go on, Rollison, go and explain your mistake to my pals outside. See what happens to you." He dropped his voice, and the savage note rasped. "They'll tear you to bits, that's what they're there for."

Ada exclaimed: "Rolly, be careful!"

"Being careful won't help him," Wallis sneered, and added: "Anyone round the back?"

"A dozen of us!" came a roar.

"These boys are well-trained," Wallis said gloating. "They know all the tricks, which is more than you do, Rollison." He put his arm round his wife's shoulders, and squeezed, while she looked at Rollison as if she couldn't quite believe that everything was as it seemed. "He thought I was tucked away for eight days and was going to try to work

on you. What were you hoping to do, you pretty hero? Hoping to make Stella and *Miss* Jepson and *Mr.* Sampson break down and tell you all about it? That the idea? Well, it didn't work, did it? And now the world knows that you were so scared of me that you tried to get me put inside while you got to work on my wife. You know what I'm going to do?" His voice was a rasping sound in Rollison's ear again. "I'm going to say I came back and found you trying to fool around with my wife, and my friends got so mad they tore you to bits. Now get out."

His wife said: "Tiny, do you think—"

"I think we've finished this smooth Mayfair type for good and all," rasped Wallis, "and I shan't go into mourning."

Rollison was backing away a little, as if still scared. Twice he darted swift glances over his shoulder, and twice the sea of faces seemed to split in two, and derisive laughter erupted.

"Donny," Rollison muttered, "you heard what he said. It's incitement to murder."

"Our Donny won't lift a finger to help you even if he could, and he won't say a word afterwards," Wallis sneered, "And Little Ada won't, either."

Rollison almost gasped: "They've got to! They're witnesses, you wouldn't dare—"

"They won't dare," Wallis said, and laughed triumphantly. "I've got them just where I want them. Haven't I, Ada?" He put out a hand and caught Ada's chin between his thumb and forefinger, and thrust her back, so that her little heart-shaped face was imprisoned. "You'll keep your pretty little trap shut because of what I can do to poor Reggie, won't you? Like to know where her kid brother is, Rollison?" He lowered his voice so that it could not carry outside; but the tape recorder was only a few feet away from him, and the door of the room was wide open. "Little Reggie didn't think he was getting enough from the Jepson business, so do you know what he started to do? He started to supply goods to one or two selected wholesalers who paid *him* in cash. No bills or invoices, and his signature was good enough on the orders. That's what little Reggie did. But he forgot to stop little Jimmy Jones from poking around, and Jones found out about Bishopps. Know what I did! I had Jones beaten up and his home smashed up, with plenty more to come if he ever talked. And then I fixed sweet Ada."

Ada said tensely: "Rolly, I simply had to do what he told me. He's hidden Reggie somewhere, I don't know where. He's got a lien on Reggie's holdings in the business. He owns nearly all the small wholesale firms we deal with, and—"

"That's enough!" Wallis rasped. "Get going, Rollison. See what it's like when you start running this gauntlet."

Three of the youths were in the doorway, and each wore a knuckle duster. One held a length of rope, with a noose tied, and soon he would throw and drop that noose over Rollison's shoulders.

"Want them to come and get you?" Wallis rasped. "Why don't you take what's coming to you like a man?"

Rollison gulped. "Donny," he said, and swallowed his words and then started again. "Donny, how did he get you?"

"He got a hold on one of my sons," Donny answered quietly. "The

boy began by buying a lot of goods cheaply, including hair, but didn't tell me about it. Then we discovered that the hair had been cut off the girls' heads and stolen, but it was too late to go to the police. My boy was too deeply involved—he could never have proved he didn't know he was buying stolen goods. Wallis had blackmailed another of my sons into buying stolen goods for the shops, too. Whenever I or my family tried to fight back, we were threatened with violence or betrayal to the police. There was undoubtedly a strong case against us, Mr. Rollison. I was literally helpless. I hoped that if I said nothing to the police, Wallis would stop persecuting me, but—it became worse. He knew about my property. He began to blackmail me into selling some of it to him at low prices. He had me and my family absolutely in the thrall of terror, Mr. Rollison. And when you came to see me, he had Leah and Lila, my unmarried daughters, shorn of their hair, and threatened their lives if I told you the truth."

"I see," said Rollison very softly. "It was Wallis himself who attacked that barber who wouldn't sell out, was it?"

"I knew nothing of it until afterwards, Mr. Rollison. If you loved your children as I do, then—"

"That's the boy, that's the doting parent," Wallis sneered. "Any sacrifice for his kids. Know your trouble, Donny? You had too many kids, some of them had to be bad for you and good for me. Okay, Rollison, now you know it all. You can take your secret to the grave!"

He laughed on a deep, roaring note.

Now get going like I tell you!"

Rollison said in a different voice, and in a different manner, almost marvelling.

"So that's it, is it? Well, well. The power behind Tiny Wallis is Tiny Wallis. You thought all this up for yourself. Very smart indeed, Tiny. I congratulate you. No one would believe that the man behind a plot like this would do his own strong-arm work. Brilliant. And nearly good enough, Tiny, but not quite."

Wallis called roughly: "Take him, boys!" and pushed Rollison towards the trio in the front doorway. The rope curled through the air and fell over Rollison's shoulders. Wallis held him tightly so that it worked its way down his arms and pinioned them to his sides. The crowd was whooping in delight as the trio in the doorway pulled at the rope and dragged Rollison towards them.

Rollison said: "They might even hang you, Wallis. You'll be back in dock tomorrow, and you'll never get away."

"Shut your big mouth!"

"Tiny," his wife said in a scared voice, "supposing he means it?"

"He'd like to," Wallis said. "*Take him away!"* The three youths tugged . . .

As they did so, car horns sounded not far off, and from the corner of the street there came the cry: *"The cops!"* There was a moment of stillness; then car engines sounded, as if the drivers were in a hurry, and the crowd began to melt away.

But behind Rollison there was Micky Clay; so he had been released, too.

In front of him was Wallis.

And he himself was pinioned and helpless. Clay spoke for the first

time: “We can do him, Tiny. We don’t need the others.”

“Keep your hands off him,” Wallis snapped hurriedly. “It was okay if the boys did it, they couldn’t blame me for that, but we can’t fix him here. Keep your hands off!” Clay looked like a disappointed cretin. “Rollison,” Wallis went on, “don’t get ideas. You’ve worked with the police for once, but they won’t be able to protect you all the time, and Donny won’t talk and nor will Ada. Not now or any time. Because they know I’ve got everything laid on, if they pull me down, they pull all the rest down. And everything I’ve done is legal, see. Donny’s made over half his property to me, Reggie Jepson will make over his shares in Jepsons or I’ll show the world he’s a bigger crook than I am. His sister wouldn’t like that—would you, Ada? I’m going to be one of the Big City Boys. Don’t try to get in my way any more.”

The police were at the door. Two cars were outside. The youths had gone, and the neighbours who watched from the other side of the street kept close to their windows and doors. The Divisional man, Harrison, was at the head of the police.

Wallis said: “What do you want? If you’ve got a warrant to search the house, okay. If you haven’t, get out.” He waited and when Harrison looked at Rollison, went on roughly:

“That aristocratic playboy can’t help you. Get out.”

Rollison said: “I won’t be a moment, Harrison.” He worked the rope off his arms and pushed past Ada and Donny into the front room. He stretched up for the tape recorder, took it down, closed it, and handed it to Harrison. “You’ve got everything, everything there you can possibly need. If you want a temporary charge to hold him on, I charge him with being in possession of property knowing it to have been stolen.”

“It’s a crazy lie!” Wallis roared. “I never keep any hot stuff here.”

“And you’ll find it hidden behind the books in the front room,” Rollison said coldly.

For a moment, no one spoke.

Then Wallis raised his fists and leapt at Rollison, leaving his scared wife. But Harrison and two other policemen closed with him, and bore him down.

Ada was crying.

Donny’s eyes were moist.

Rollison said to them: “Whatever Reggie’s done, whatever your sons have done, we can prove that it was under threat of force. You needn’t worry any more. And Wallis can’t do another thing. He can’t touch your family, Donny. He can’t touch Jones or anyone who might help you, Ada. He’ll be inside for at least ten years, and possibly twice as long.

“Get that into your heads. He’s finished once and for all.”

“Oh, yes, Wallis is finished,” Grice said, some two hours later. He was in his office at the Yard, and Rollison was sitting back in an easy chair, on the other side of the desk. “We didn’t know exactly what he was doing, but knew it was big, and we knew that funny things were happening at both Jepsons and Donny’s. We thought that one or the other was employing Wallis, and when Donny virtually admitted it by refusing to deny it—”

Rollison interrupted mildly: “Nice example of psychological

terrorism. It used to apply to some of the bad boys, but I'd almost forgotten the phrase. Find a weakness, work on it, and remember that the strongest human emotion is fear for the safety of loved ones. Simple human philosophy, even if you do say it's corny."

"The affair seems to have started about a year ago, when Reggie Jepson needed some money," Grice said, "and began as a little racket with a wholesaler. The world thought that young Jepson was worth millions, but all he had until he was thirty was the interest from his shares, and from a trust fund. Not enough for a young blood, and—" Grice shrugged. "Well, you'll see it in the depositions, we needn't go into everything now. Whenever anyone involved in the racket was on the point of talking, Wallis stopped them. The man Rickett was one. Each of Wallis's victims knew about the stolen goods. But before the thefts were reported to the police, Wallis had so influenced Reginald Jepson that he threw his weight into Jepsons buying Bishopps, and Ada agreed. That way it became a transfer of goods, not theft. There isn't any doubt," went on Grice quietly, "that Wallis thought he could eventually take over both Jepsons and Donny's. And so he might. No one would have suspected what he was up to, would always have assumed he was employed by someone else. Didn't you take it for granted that either Donny or Reginald Jepson was behind him?"

"Absolutely," said Rollison. "Have you found Reggie Jepson?"

"He's in Switzerland, and on his way home," said Grice. "Wallis had sent him out of the way."

"I wonder why men as clever as Wallis make mistakes," Rollison mused. "He beat Jones up without making sure that Jones knew why. If Jones—"

"He took it for granted Jones would know the reason," Grice said. "The queerest mistake was in breaking up the Blakes' home. He thought they were Jones's relations, of course; he liked to work on families. Do you know why he heaved the hair tied to bricks through Ada Jepson's window?"

"No," said Rollison.

"Ada Jepson knew the girl called Goldilocks. Next morning, she heard about her hair being cut off. And Ada Jepson was then told by telephone that if she betrayed her brother no one would be safe."

"Wallis hardly missed a trick," Rollison said, "but he hadn't all the trumps."

"His worst mistake was in attacking Jolly," Grice declared. "That was the thing that really got you going. I'm told Jolly's out of danger."

"Yes, thank God," said Rollison.

* * *

It was late autumn.

The trials were over, and Wallis had been sent down for fifteen years. There had been no prosecution against Reggie Jepson, who gave evidence for the crown, and left the box, a trembling, frightened man.

"He really is going abroad for a holiday," Ada said. "The trustees have decided that it's no use expecting him to be any good in the business, and he'd never live this down at home. We're going to draw in some new blood on the board."

"Starting with Jimmy Jones?"

“How did you guess?” asked Ada, and she gripped Rollison’s arm, while her face became radiant. “If you only knew how much I love him! When he was attacked I realised why, and I think that meant more to me than Reggie’s reputation. I felt that I couldn’t say a word to the police, and Wallis could make me do anything he wanted. When I came to you, I hoped that you might work a miracle, but I couldn’t go on.”

“All I want to hear now is that Jimmy’s fallen in love with you,” Rollison said, “and has completely forgotten a girl named Goldilocks who has lovelier hair than ever.”

Ada laughed. “I’m not worried about Goldilocks! As a matter of fact she’s leaving the offices and becoming a model at one of Donny’s shops. She—oh, Rolly, I knew there was something I wanted to ask you. Is it true that you’re going to be a judge at the Beautiful Short Hair competition? Goldilocks thinks she’s almost certain to win.”

“Believe it or not, I shall be one of the judges,” said Rollison, “and she will win if I can see to it honestly.” He turned to his trophy wall as Jolly came in with drinks; a Jolly who was quite himself again, and whose scars showed hardly at all. “Ah, thanks, Jolly. When are we going to add the new souvenir to the trophy wall?”

“As a matter of fact, sir, I thought that it would be wise if we were to wait until the competition has been won and then try to obtain a small lock of the winner’s hair,” said Jolly. “I feel sure she will be co-operative.”

* * *

Goldilocks won by the solemn vote of all the judges, and waved triumphantly to James Matthison Jones as she stood on the dais, surrounded by the runners-up, all girls with hair so beautiful that most of it seemed unreal. Jimmy Jones was sitting in a box with the other directors of Jepsons, and Adonis Sampson was standing a little to one side, looking as if he could not wait to go up to the winner and begin to dress her hair.

The End